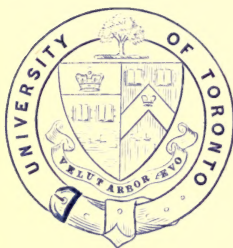




3 1761 06859642 8

HUMAN  
QUINTESSENCE  
&  
SIGURD IBSEN



Presented to  
**The Library**  
of the  
**University of Toronto**  
by

**Mrs. J. S. Hart**







# HUMAN QUINTESSENCE



Philos  
I 1473h

Ej

# HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

BY

SIGURD IBSEN

*Son of the Hero Henri*

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

MARCIA HARGIS JANSON



429603  
14.11.44

NEW YORK  
B. W. HUEBSCH

1912

Copyright, 1911, by  
GYLDENDALSKE BOGHANDEL

---

Copyright, 1912, by  
B. W. HUEBSCH

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

## CONTENTS

I	PAGE
NATURE AND MAN . . . . .	3
II	
WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND . . . . .	119
III	
OF HUMAN APTITUDES AND A HUMAN ART . . .	191
IV	
OF GREAT MEN: AN ESSAY IN VALUATION . .	231





## NATURE AND MAN



## NATURE AND MAN

### I

WE all know that there exist religious dogmas that are matters of faith, but to which comprehension is impervious; also, that there are ethical rules one acknowledges with the lips, but seldom makes use of as guidance for one's actions; but probably only the few are fully aware that there are certain scientific truths that are subject to corresponding limitations in that we appropriate them solely as topics of information, but do not admit them into our deeper consciousness. And I venture to make this statement concerning those very systems that have the widest theoretical scope—none other than the discoveries that are associated with the names of Copernicus and Darwin. The earth slung out of its central station, man deprived of his divine patent of

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

nobility: the extent of this displacement of ideas has never been equalled, for it concerns itself with the very basis of our existence. One may imagine a king, filled with the most exalted thoughts of his birth and gracious calling, who so comes to learn that he is a changeling, a working man's son: what a subversion will take place in his mind! How is it to be explained, then, that such a tremendous alteration as that which science has produced in the conception formerly extant in regard to the earth's position in the universe and man's status in our planetary life has not influenced the entire range of our fundamental instincts and given the race quite new values with which to reckon? For no one can maintain that our view of life has become darker, our self-valuation lower than that of the generations who believed that the earth was the center of the universe and that on the fifth day of creation man was formed in God's image. There is only one explanation: we have adopted these views of nature into our intelligence by a purely rational mode of procedure but they



## NATURE AND MAN

have not penetrated into our emotions; they have not succeeded in changing our motives, our ideals, our inner ego.

Therefore: when one hears mention of a conception of the universe based on natural science (to speak more accurately, a monistic conception) which is constantly gaining ground, one must beware of attaching an exaggerated importance to the transformation. It is true, every schoolboy in these days is taught that it is the earth that revolves about the sun and that this body is simply one fixed star among millions of others. We know that both the one and the other are at the mercy of the laws of transitoriness and, sooner or later, must disappear, either by natural decay or by a violent catastrophe. What then will remain of our little planet? Even now it is nothing more than a grain of dust in the universe. Perhaps it is not even unique of its kind: there may be other spheres that are undergoing a similar development, that also could exhibit organic life and, in this respect, may have advanced farther than our earth.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

This is what natural science tells us and we accept it in a way; that is to say, we register it dutifully in our brains. But one thing is theory, another practice: we do homage to Copernicus, but follow Ptolemy. And it is not only in our manner of speaking that we still allow the sun to rise and set. We are bound to the earth and, infinitesimal as it is, for us, it is the center of all things. How often do we hear it repeated that astronomy's teachings should inculcate humility in us, because they constantly remind us of what a really insignificant part of the world is our planet and the life that abounds on it. It sounds so reasonable and yet is, after all, only cheap wisdom. The immeasurable dimensions of the heavens when expressed in numbers do impress us momentarily, but just because they are so incalculable, the figures do not awaken an effective conception in our minds. We lack power of appreciation of the infinitely great, as well as of the infinitely small; our sight is adjusted to earthly, human conditions. When other spheres are mentioned, what is the point that

## NATURE AND MAN

catches the layman's attention? The huge extent, the enormous distances? No, in nine out of ten cases, it will appear, significantly enough, that his interest concentrates itself on the question as to whether or not these stars are inhabited by creatures that resemble men.

The human being is certainly to us the most important object in the world. To be otherwise, would imply that we had found the Archimedean point which permitted us to observe ourselves from a station outside of and beyond our human state. We have not found it, however, and when it is announced that Darwin gave the death blow to anthropocentric conceptions, we can acknowledge the truth of the statement from a scientific point of view, but not as applied to a practical view of life. Research tells us that man is only a link in a chain, a gifted upstart, sprung from very humble sources. We hear that the period he has lived on earth is extremely short compared to the *ancien régime* of other organic forms and we draw the conclusion that just as he has once come into existence, so will he some day

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

disappear. For science teaches us that we are of no especial importance in this great natural process. Nature has no sympathy for our joys and sorrows: both insect and man, in their transitory condition of development of material and power, are creatures of a day, of whose insignificance we catch a glimpse when we think of unlimited space and eternal time. And we can acknowledge this teaching, we can confess to our own inconsiderableness with becoming modesty, we can coquet with it in an idle moment; we can so easily do all this, because at heart we do not really believe in our newly-acquired scientific wisdom, but, in spite of everything, still feel ourselves the elect of creation. In theory, we can proclaim the unity of nature and include ourselves in this great continuity. Pantheists, Monists: let us say that we have a certain right to call ourselves thus in virtue of our being adherents of a philosophical system. But when it comes to the point, we prove to be such in a manner not very unlike the way in which Victor Hugo desired to be a citizen of the world and a democrat:

## NATURE AND MAN

citizen of the world in a common brotherhood, where Victor Hugo's fatherland should march at the head of the nations and democrat in a society where all men should be equal with the exception of Victor Hugo, the unique, the peerless.

“And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” says Hamlet of his fellow men. What is it? It is everything for us, it is the world itself. Never will the infinity of nature impress our minds as does the multiplicity of human life. Wonderful as it is, its phenomena will never be able to exert upon us an influence that can rival that of human manifestations, of man, as individual, of man, in the mass. In this respect, the immeasurability of Sirius can not compete with Cæsar's greatness nor can the Lisbon earthquake nor Krakatoa's volcanic eruption be compared, in lasting depth of impression, with certain episodes in the French Revolution. Nature is foreign to us and if it is to be brought nearer, it must be by humanizing it, as it were. For man has always been the measuring rod for



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

all things; whether we have wished to explain to ourselves either Nature or Divinity, it has always been by means of the human medium, *sub specie humanitatis*. The Highest Being in every religion is a comprehension of those human qualities, at the time considered the most perfect. Phidias could not represent his Zeus nor Michael Angelo his Almighty Father in any other than human form. The fable that lets the dumb brutes speak, the allegory that puts significance into lifeless objects, the poet that sings the force of the elements, the painter that interprets for us the beauty of nature, we ourselves when we devoutly admire nature: what do we and they do, other than fill it with human thoughts and feelings. That nature to which we are told Goethe longed to abandon himself, was after all created by him, a reflex of his own spiritual emotions. Pantheism counts him among its greatest names; and indeed, what system is there that could not appropriate him—this universal intelligence, that spanned both Occident and Orient, that was at once both classic and

## NATURE AND MAN

romantic, imprinted with the repose of antique art and permeated by modern sensibility. Yes, Goethe was a pantheist, but he was also a worshiper of great personality. One may counterbalance his *Lieder* by his *Oden*, his feeling for nature is equipoised by his exaltation of man, and this finds its mightiest expression in the poem *Prometheus*.

He who would in spirit and truth make a reality of his natural-science view of the world, must tear himself away from this human subjectivism. He must do away with the opposition between the ego and the material world, he must incorporate himself into the universe, he must, in harmony with all forms, take part in the life of all existing bodies. Like Buddha under the fig tree he must strive to lose himself in an all-embracing Nirvana, purified from the passions and prejudices which belong to our kind. But unlike Buddha, who in his innermost depths was actuated by sympathy for the race and by the desire to show it the way to rest and peace, he must not allow himself to be controlled by human partiality.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

Certainly he would not exclude the human altogether: this being a part of Pan-Nature would also find a place in his system, but it would not be the most essential part to him, he would not exalt it to a principle. He would look upon human conditions just as on other phenomena. Happiness and misery, virtue and vice, advancement and degeneration—these would no longer be for him, objects of joy or sorrow, of praise or blame, but only a spectacle of power and movement, a link in a chain, the consequence of general laws of cause and effect, in common with the growth of cells or the revolution of heavenly bodies. In Paul Bourget's book, *Le Disciple*, the author has drawn a philosopher, Adrien Sixte, who has set himself the task of realizing such a programme. And he is capable of doing so, so long as he is seated at his desk and his only concern is to occupy himself with scientific works. But one fine day he is dragged out of his book-worm existence: he becomes involved in a tragedy, which he has unwillingly had a share in invoking. Then his system fails him

## NATURE AND MAN

and his soul is shaken through and through, exactly as it would happen with an ordinary creature. Thus it is in romance, and in reality it would probably not take a different form. The book is biased but nevertheless contains a grain of truth.

Indeed it is a question whether a philosopher of this type can be quite consistent, can entirely free himself from his sense of the human, even when he is concerned only with the exposition of theories. Where should one seek this strict consistency if not in the utterances of the great master of modern monism, Ernest Haeckel? Now, from among those writings that embody his views of the universe, I shall choose, as illustration, the shortest but at the same time the one that outlines his principles most concisely. It is a reprint of a much-noticed lecture, delivered several years ago at a natural-science congress and bears the title *Der Monismus als Band zwischen Religion und Wissenschaft*. The eleventh edition lies before me and it is easy to understand its popularity. It treats of sub-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

jects that interest wide circles and does so in a manner that makes for easy reading and is at the same time thought-compelling, finished in form, rich in content. The first part, the natural-scientific premises, is complete enough. In a brilliant synthesis, Haeckel shows us the unity of the universe, the inextricable connection between spirit and matter, the merging of energy and matter into substance, the validity for all existence of the law of substance. He proclaims the underlying unity in inorganic and organic nature, of which the latter, according to him, has sprung from the former. He emphasizes the common origin of all organisms: all plant and animal forms are twigs of one and the same genealogical tree, the race of man a shoot of the vertebrate animal branch. There is no absolute difference between plant and animal, animal and man. And just as little is there a schism between body and soul: the psychic development is dependent on the physical and the human consciousness differs from the animal only in degree. That which we call soul



## NATURE AND MAN

is a sum of plasma movements and consciousness is a brain-function, depending on the mechanical work of the ganglia cells and these, in their turn can be traced to chemical and physical processes. The individual soul disappears with the individual body: man's demand for immortality is reduced *in absurdum*, as well as his faith in a personal God who interferes in human affairs. After having spread out for our view his canvas where great Nature is sole ruler and whence all human superstition, all dualistic prejudice is swept away like withered leaves, Haeckel arrives at his real subject: monism as a link between religion and science, the proof of the application of this principle to life. And we listen in excited expectation. How will it sound—the gospel of monism? Will our accustomed speech suffice to express the new thought? Yes, accustomed speech is amply sufficient and the thought is of venerable age. For the message we receive is this: we must strive to attain the good, the beautiful and the true. Now this is a melody which we, one and all,

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

can join in singing, but we have heard it from babyhood and our forefathers before us and it is sung most often by those who do not at all share this natural-scientific view of the world. They have come to the same result as Haeckel without the help of his monistic substructure—which proves that monistic reasoning neither adds to it nor subtracts from it. Nor is there any reciprocal connection between his premise and his conclusion; the one is scientific and the other can very well pass for a confession of faith; but the link he promised to forge between religion and science, that is not to be discovered. I am quite aware that he has attempted to effect a connection by recommending us to strive after the good, the beautiful and the true via a monistic route. But what does that mean? “Monistic aims”: is not this juxtaposition a contradiction? By the word “monistic” can be understood that which is in harmony with nature. But now our strivings, in other words, the activities of our conscious aims, are just those that emphasize human peculiarities and differentiate them

## NATURE AND MAN

from the rest of nature. No one has striven more systematically than Haeckel himself to prove the lack of aim in nature and he would certainly be the first to combat the thought that nature in its entirety should reveal intellectual, ethical and æsthetic tendencies.

If his prelude is monistic his finale is human—some will perhaps find that its last note is almost too human. For raising himself to a poetic pitch, he ends his speech by pointing to an incident which he mentions as a favorable indication that his creed will triumph. Take notice of the omen: in the neighborhood of the spot where he is holding his lecture the princes of Thüringen, noble protectors of the University of Jena are, at the moment, assembled to celebrate a rare feast, the golden wedding of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Weimar. This well-turned compliment calls us back to the kingdom of reality. It is just as when the actor who has died in the play, appears before the curtain and bows to the applauding audience. In reappearing, he says to us (if we have not already said it to our-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

selves): "Ladies and gentlemen, it was not meant so seriously; for a few hours we have forgotten ourselves in the tense atmosphere of the drama; but we cannot wander forever in dreamland; life announces itself and demands its rights." From time to time we can also translate ourselves to the sphere of a natural-science view of the world; but it is cold on these heights and we soon turn our steps downward toward the cheerful valley where the human element reigns—notably the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. For he also represents one side of the eternal human. Do not underestimate him; it is not easy to get around this great man. The natural-scientist can do away with God the Father; but he cannot deny the existence of the Grand Duke. He can degrade the race of man to a shoot from the tree of vertebrate animals; but that does not prevent his showing respect for certain of its individuals, certain privileged vertebrate animals, as if they were a species raised above the ordinary laws of life. Laplace found the formula for the mechanism of the solar system,

## NATURE AND MAN

he concerned himself with the very highest problems, his sovereign thoughts moved about in unlimited space and did not allow themselves to be checked by any Creator; he said that he had "no use for this hypothesis"; our Lord did not impress him in the least. But he was filled with awe for the great Napoleon, he bowed low before the corpulent Louis XVIII and however much he wandered about in the infinity of the starry heavens, he never reached so far that he became oblivious to the brilliancy of those other stars that are distributed by potentates. What did it help then that he was a monist? Alack! how little ultimate significance these phrases possess. The monist can theoretically refer all phenomena to a single principle; but in real life, dualism makes its plea to him also: we humans, on the one side, the rest of nature, on the other. In his life he will assign to human affairs an importance which his theories declare to be inordinate. It is ineffectual for science to proclaim that such things are trifles, that daily human events become infinitesimal when one remembers that

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

the entire history of mankind is only a short episode in the organic development of one little planet. He will none the less scan the newspapers for the latest telegrams, interest himself in the sayings and doings of his fellowmen, share in their joys and sorrows, join this or that political party, like all good citizens be concerned over the condition of the budget, allow himself to be influenced by personal affection, social considerations or patriotic prejudices. In short, in his daily life he will be a human among humans. Of course, this may express itself in different ways—in both the bad and the good meaning of the words—he may be the prey of weaknesses and inconsistencies like Laplace or he may be a straightforward character, a noble personality, as Darwin or Spencer was; but the human element can under no circumstances be disregarded, either in his own case, or as applied to others. There are those for whom research seems to be everything. Like religion it can boast of its martyrs—we call them the martyrs of science; but the title is not literally correct: they should



## NATURE AND MAN

be called martyrs not of science, but of human feeling. They have offered well-being, health and life apparently to the idea, the undertaking, the experiment, but behind the scientific ardor there always lies a deeper inducement, a *primus motor*: the irresistible longing, more or less conscious, of furthering the comprehension and happiness of their fellow-men. All of the really great in the world of science have been inspired by this emotion. It impregnates Ernest Haeckel also and for the sake of the humanity in his life work, we gladly forgive him the too-human element.

Let us agree then that, no matter how we act, our every thought runs upon the human. It leaves us no peace, it makes all the strings of our innermost being resound and, whether it fills us with hate or love, with fear or pleasure, with contempt or worship, it keeps us imprisoned in its charmed circle. It might be worth our while to examine the causes of this dependence, to see whether or not it is a necessary result of unchangeable conditions. Even though we are absolutely wanting in knowl-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

edge, both of our own spiritual organism and of the exterior influences that are decisive for our feelings, thoughts and actions, we can nevertheless try to find an answer to the question, at least conjecturally. The following attempt at an explanation makes no pretenses to be other than a surmise. Its point of issue lies in the assumption that we and all other existences that surround us, are in constant connection with all the forms of energy. Expressed in more detail, the idea is: nothing takes place in the universe without influencing us, we undertake nothing that does not influence the universe. Everything that happens exhibits all-embracing effects. These may, in certain cases, be infinitesimally small, unmeasurable and unnoticeable; but they will always be present. Two conditions are necessary in order that they shall assert themselves with great intensity: a certain strength in the agent that influences and a certain receptivity in the object influenced. This second factor, receptivity, naturally plays the more important rôle and we must consider it as based on a so-



## NATURE AND MAN

called "harmony" between the parts concerned—the active and the passive. It is a harmony similar to that spoken of in music and in wireless telegraphy. A tuning-fork vibrates in harmonious correspondence to a certain tone struck; two Marconi instruments correspond when they are tuned to the same electrical wave-length. We find analogous conditions with human beings: as creatures similar in kind they are reciprocally tuned to similar keys and each of them therefore is especially receptive to the forces that emanate from his fellow-creatures—in more or less degree, of course, but at least they are more receptive to these expressions of energy than to all other telluric and cosmic expositions in whose whirls we live and move. This effect of human power can be easily observed where the influence is exercised through the medium of words and actions; but it is not limited to the use of these outer and visible means. A transference of thought and feeling can take place without their help: we experience it at unexpected moments in our relation to those closely allied to

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

us, in the society of congenial souls. Such phenomena are explained thus: the brain's oscillations transmitted through the ether (just as all other vibrations) reach another brain and involuntarily call forth analogous oscillations in it. The effects would be stronger or weaker according to the brains' affinity or perhaps also according to the distance which separates them in space. The effect may be minimal; but we cannot suppose that there is a limit beyond which it is totally absent. The theory has been proposed (and it should by no means be discredited) that the molecular movements of every brain are transferred to all other brains, that our souls are constantly under the influence of and are themselves constantly influencing all other existing human souls. These numberless influences can cross, repel, dissolve each other, but they can also unite themselves into groups, forming a psychic stream of a power that we are not able to withstand. Who can say what part this condition plays in the rise of ideas, tendencies and trends of opinion? If we knew

## NATURE AND MAN

this, our psychology, our historical research and our social science would stand on a higher plane than it does. As it is, we can only guess at things in a general way. We suspect that our entire existence is subject to a sum of influences of which we must remain unconscious because they together constitute the very element in which we spiritually live and move. We are woven into a net of common feelings, whose meshes are formed of millions of creatures, who do not know us and whom we never come to know, but who nevertheless hinder us, just as we hinder them, from ever reaching out to that great freedom beyond the human.

All we can do is to move about inside the net. We can evade certain influences, a certain definite environment, but even if we were to shut ourselves up in a cell, if we were to hide ourselves in the wilderness, if we were to fly from the sight of man, there is one thing from which we cannot escape, and that is ourselves. We can not separate ourselves from our own ego, we can not strip off our own humanity. Therefore, our philosophy, for

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

one thing, will be specifically human; and the natural-science view of the world is so in practice. It rests first of all on the concept, nature; but the moment we undertake to formulate this concept, we ourselves become the psychic subject, thereby placing ourselves outside of and in opposition to nature, the creation of our own psychic intelligence.

Therefore from the very beginning, this is a violation of the principle of unity, but without doubt a violation impossible to avoid, for a consistent monism would demand an exertion of strength which we are simply incapable of putting forth. It has been said of Christianity that it, in its unblended form, makes demands on us that exceed our powers. But compared with the demands of monism, they are not so extreme. True enough, real Christianity has never been practiced by the great masses: entire peoples and states have not been able to adapt themselves so as to rest on a foundation of renunciation and withdrawal from the world. For average creatures it has been at best a religion for Sunday.

## NATURE AND MAN

use only, and they have assimilated from its teachings only those elements that were not in irreconcilable strife with their innermost inclinations. To lose themselves in the great beyond, to turn away from the earthly life, has not been their concern; on the contrary, they have wanted, above all things to live; their kingdom has been of the earth, earthly, and, no matter how much they have offered up prayers for heavenly bliss, it has nevertheless been the joys of the earth that they have coveted most keenly. But pure Christianity, although seemingly so inaccessible, if looked at rightly shows a connection with humanity absolutely continuous. The worship it enforces concerns a God who, considering all things, is an ideal human being: the worship of God is the worship of man. The brotherly love it proclaims is altruism carried to an extremity; but the feeling itself, sympathy with our kind has always been a deep lying instinct in human nature. The sacrifices which religion demands of its followers may be heavy enough, but in offering future compensation,

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

it appeals to human self-interest. Whenever a Christian has given his life for his faith, he has done so in order to win another and a better life; he has abandoned his destructible body to the mercy of Fate, in order to save his immortal soul; he has acted from a more remote motive of self-preservation. That which seems to us to be a denial of the human, is in its way, intended as a continuation, an extension of it. A consistent Christianity has always been an exception, has signified excess but, at any rate, it is an excess that lies within the human grasp. On the other hand, a consistent monism is inconceivable, because it would presuppose an absolute renunciation of the human, a merging of our ego into a non-ego. It would be in utter opposition to all our needs, quite aside from the fact that no one can say how we should act under it. And therefore it may be asserted that if the true Christian is a rarity, the true monist is a phenomenon we have never seen and never shall see.

But what does this prove, one will ask.



## NATURE AND MAN

Must we conclude from it that monism is a delusion? By no means, and it should really be superfluous to point out that the foregoing observations are not in the least aimed at monism as such. It is willingly conceded that monism satisfies our intellectual cravings regarding causality more than any other philosophical system; indeed one can go further and say that natural research absolutely forces this theory upon us by the necessities of logic. Our intention has not been to combat monistical teachings, but only to prove that we are unfitted to apply them to ourselves. Now this state of affairs has obviously such far-reaching consequences that we cannot content ourselves with the simple statement. The question arises, involuntarily—does it not imply a state of imperfection for which we should, as far as we are able, try to find a remedy? One is inclined to assume so in advance. It seems natural to reason thus: if we acknowledge a theory, we must also accept its consequences. We are not exempt from this duty because it is difficult, because a com-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

plete execution of it is unattainable. Indeed, the distinctive characteristic of an ideal is that it can never be quite attained; but we should none the less strive after it. The monistic teaching does convince us once for all of the unity of nature, and we should therefore form our lives after its views, bring our existences, as far as possible, into harmony with this Pan-Nature, of which we acknowledge to being a part. This conclusion seems incontestable; but if we make a closer investigation, we discover that it is contradicted by an impregnable fact, for experience teaches us that what we agree in regarding as human perfectibility, can be traced to what appears to us as a practice that is anti-monistic; in other words, that all our progress, technical and political, intellectual and moral, is accompanied by an ever-growing element of opposition between man and the rest of nature. And it must be noted that the fact of its necessarily being so and the cause of its being so, become fully manifest to us by means of this very science of nature and the philosophy based upon it—al-



## NATURE AND MAN

though its apostles have either been unaware of it or else have not suffered themselves to carry their argument through to this conclusion.

## II

WHAT is nature? Before entering upon such a subject as the relationship between nature and man we should really be able to answer this. But no satisfactory reply to the question can be given. We are constantly realizing that we cannot grasp nature in its entirety, that we cannot so much as examine it in all of its details. Spinoza, long ago, propounded the conjecture, that "absolute substance" perhaps possesses attributes for which we cannot account. Later Kant pointed out, in his theory of knowledge, that we can learn nothing of things in themselves, but only as they reveal themselves to us. And finally experimental science has arrived and informed us of the insufficiency of our poor five senses; we learn that their activities are limited because the human organism is adjusted to no more than the scattered categories

## NATURE AND MAN

of the ether-vibrations that to our minds constitute the life of the universe. We lack the inborn powers of comprehension necessary to grasp the movements, which lie between and beyond these categories. We know that there exist colors, sounds, electric streams, magnetic attractions and repulsions that escape our senses. By means of sensitive instruments we have been able to establish their existence; but, in addition to these provable phenomena are other forms of energy, that we can neither feel nor measure. We have learned by a very simple method that these forms exist, but we have no suspicion of their number, their nature, nor their mode of operation. What is it then, that we call nature? Only a portion of the exterior world—the portion that we comprehend—in reality therefore a reflection of the state of our own sense-organs and nerve-cells. Creatures, with structures adapted to vibration-forms, unknown to us, would interpret things in a way different from ours, just as a slight change in the human organism could modify our entire conception

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of the world. The world itself, we must assume, would continue to be the same, only no longer the same for us, and we would perhaps come to a more perfect comprehension than that to which we can now, in our present state, attain. As things are, we must acknowledge that our consciousness can apprehend only fragments of nature and even these we observe and perceive through the colored spectacles of subjectivity.

Now, of course, we can sharpen our powers of observation and widen our point of view. We can make instruments that, to a certain extent, remedy the defective equipment of our sense-outfit, and we can form scientific hypotheses which fill in the holes of empiric research and throw a light on conditions that are not accessible to direct experience. But it is clear, that by this means, we come only a part of the way, that there is a barrier we cannot pass, in that both the inventive powers that produce instruments and the intellectual liberty that creates hypotheses, are conditioned by and will eventually be limited by the scope of

## NATURE AND MAN

man's powers. Even the natural-science hypothesis, which is certainly built on the assumption of conformity to law, moves within the human sphere of thought by this very assumption. The conception "law" was originally applied to social conditions and thence transferred to the processes of nature. But the analogy limps, for the legal standards that rule our society, have an independent existence, while the regulations supposed to underlie nature, consist in the necessities that dwell in the things themselves. We cannot substantiate a law of nature by direct methods, as we substantiate laws of state. It is not laws we observe in nature, but groups of facts from whose mutual harmonies we infer a conformity to law. We see a number of constantly recurring conditions of cause and effect and explain this recurrence to ourselves, as a result of necessity. Our intellect is so constituted that we are forced to this induction; but we can admit no more than this. Newton believed that the so-called laws of nature do not exist in themselves, but are only

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

formulæ, that come to the assistance of our apprehension. We need these formulæ, we could not investigate scientifically and technically without them and so far they are completely justifiable. But, on the other hand, we must not hide from ourselves, that it is we, who attribute to things this natural necessity and that we have no warrant that it is really present. Strictly speaking, we know nothing of the causes that lie behind the processes of nature. It is worthy of remark that while natural research is constantly making new conquests, at the same time, the fundamental laws of natural philosophy are becoming more and more uncertain. They totter, whether we call the philosophic principle spirit or matter. For what is spirit, and what is matter? Unwary materialism that would refer all phenomena to matter, could, in its day, boast that at least it reckoned with tangible facts. But matter no longer presents the sure support that it was thought to render. We must nowadays confess that if the nature of spirit is obscure to us, that of matter is no less so.

## NATURE AND MAN

There are those who resolve it into sheer energy. But even if we consider matter as an expression of energy, we have progressed no further in comprehension. For energy, also, is a puzzle to us and we can moreover investigate only a few of its forms.

What do we know then, what can we really learn about this world we live in? Only so much as it discloses to us and, if we try to interpret it, we do so in our own way. In time, our philosophy of nature will become less naïve; but even the most liberal spirits will always entangle it in human meshes. The mere fact that it is necessary to comprise all "nature" under one collective concept, makes a personification unconsciously tempting. And the conception of nature still prevalent among the great majority! It is pure anthropomorphism. Naturally this no longer appears in its most extreme form, as the actual personification of objects and phenomena that we know from mythology. But it has persisted in a representation of a spirit in or behind nature, higher than ours it is true, but,



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

at the same time, fundamentally similar and, above all, animated by wisdom and goodness. Not only the advocates of religions, but also the worshipers of reason and freethinkers have, in some form or another, sworn allegiance to the belief in such a directing, guiding and progressive principle. We have been inoculated with it ever since our school days. Who has not learned from teachers and parents of beneficent mother nature, who arranges all things so wisely for her children. Natural science, in the last fifty years, has shaken the foundations of tradition, but the amended concept has by no means forced its way. The human mind is repelled by its cold and hard consequences and even in scientific circles, there are those who make compromises with the old ideas. In this connection, I can refer to a book that serves as an example of what could be done in this respect as late as the year of our Lord 1908 (Professor Dr. M. Wilhelm Meyer: *Vom Himmel und von der Erde*). We are told here that the universe is a harmonious whole, where every atom has its task



## NATURE AND MAN

and works restlessly towards the completion of it. For all nature-development strives for perfection, for progress in structure, in reason and in beauty. Every worm, that endeavors to improve its condition, every chaotic cloud-mass, that forms itself into a circulating heavenly body shows that longing for the higher animates the least as well as the greatest. In the organic world the struggle for existence is a fight between the good and the bad. Nature is inexhaustible in her means of helping the progress of life and she has therefore given human beings their intelligence among other things. It is true, these opinions are found in a book which was meant to reach a wide public; but one cannot assume that the author has, on that account, done violence to his convictions and it must be pointed out that he, besides being a popular-science writer has an esteemed name as a professional researcher—which proves that one may be capable in exact investigation and at the same time weak in philosophic production. An unprejudiced observation can only come to the result that

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

nature is incomprehensible. Those, who believe that it is guided by a consciousness, ought, in any case, to acknowledge that it cannot resemble the human and that its ways and means are not identical with ours. The well-meaning and expedient tendencies that are imaginatively attributed to nature, can just as easily be disproved as corroborated, according to the facts, from which one selects his material. If new globes are forming at certain points in space, at other points there are globes that are approaching destruction and there is nothing to indicate that the process of development is stronger than that of dissolution. Or—to keep to the sphere that lies nearest our comprehension, organic nature—what is it that is revealed to us when we look about us? Measured by human standards, it is a game with forms, promiscuous creation and destruction. By the side of phenomena that may be interpreted as results of forethought, we see absolute indifference as to life and happiness; by the side of combinations apparently ingenious, we see half-finished at-

## NATURE AND MAN

tempts, eternal detours, an enormous waste of rudimentary forms and possibilities; on the whole, a striking lack of plan and economy, of right and justice—in a word, a lack of valuation. So much is certain: a band of wild men however hardy, could not survive, if it took nature as teacher in everything; and the more we separate ourselves from nature, the nearer we come—we and our methods—to the human ideal.

The reluctance felt against adopting the new natural science, the inner strife between knowledge and feeling, between investigations that cannot be dismissed and life-ideals that one is unwilling to relinquish, have caused many to compromise. Confronted by the conditions under which the struggle for existence takes place, they have been forced to discard their belief in the goodness of nature but, in compensation they think that their belief in the wisdom of nature has found a stronghold in science itself, in the Darwinian natural-selection theory. We know that, in the struggle for existence, a choice takes

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

place, by which those less able to face existence disappear, while those more fortunately equipped survive, propagate their kind and transplant their qualities by inheritance. This explanation of the mechanism of life's development is as well-known as it is misunderstood—misunderstood, of course, chiefly by laymen, but in some cases also by people who should know better. Again and again it is used to prove that nature, though she seems uncharitable, yet strives after progress. The mistake has been corrected many times, but is stubbornly maintained, so we must repeat once again: Darwin does not teach, as is often expounded, that "nature is aristocratic," that the best triumph in the struggle; he teaches that the best-qualified triumph, that is to say those whose qualities correspond most accurately to given conditions and these conditions, in certain cases, are more favorable to a lower than to a higher organism. A poisonous insect can thrive in a swamp, where a human creature would perish. Stronger individuals may be vanquished by weaker, when

## NATURE AND MAN

these are present in sufficient numbers. Primitive gigantic animals have died out while millions of microscopic creatures still exist. The small sometimes accomplish more than the great: it is not the whale, but the coral, that builds islands and archipelagos; it is not the lion, but the mushroom, that changes the appearance and condition of things. In order to believe in an inherent tendency towards progress, we must have the conviction that development has taken place according to a plan, that adjusts changing conditions in favor of existences constantly becoming more and more perfect. But there is no support for such an assumption. We see much oftener that the lowest forms continue to exist side by side with the highest and there are even proofs that exterior conditions can change so that they cause the structure and functions of the creatures affected by them to deteriorate. The existence and dominating position of the human race are not even decisive proofs of the triumph of perfection. For who knows but that, during the develop-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ment of organic forms, many life-germs, bearing in themselves richer possibilities than those our species can realize, have gone to waste. One may say, by the way, that it is by no means certain that man is the masterpiece one likes to imagine. Even the way in which he comes into the world is food for criticism: physicians tell us that the mechanism of childbirth is an extremely unpractical arrangement, which does little honor to the "ingenuity of nature." Nor is our sense-equipment irreproachable: Helmholtz is said to have remarked that if one of his assistants were to bring him a preparation so imperfect as the human eye, it would be rejected without ceremony. That humans are more sensitive to pain than any other creatures, is a doubtful advantage; some try to explain this as a consideration of utility, but unsatisfactorily as, in most cases, pain cannot be shown to be serviceable for any end. On the contrary, it often makes the patient unmanageable, where quiet is the necessity of the moment. The warning element attributed to it is inconsistent with



## NATURE AND MAN

the fact that mortal illness, such as inflammation of the kidneys and cancer are absolutely painless in the first crucial stages, while fairly harmless diseases of the teeth announce themselves immediately by violent neuralgic pains. In fact, the increasing sensitiveness, which accompanies the refining of the nervous system both with animals and man, is not only a source of new sufferings, but a growing hindrance to their adaptation to their surroundings. It is a mistaken belief that higher forms are naturally endowed with greater powers of endurance than lower. We understand by "higher forms of life" those that are characterized by the condition in which different functions are apportioned to special organs. This differentiation certainly carries with it a greater perfection in the exercise of the function, but on the other hand, also a greater danger in case of disturbance and distress, as existence becomes thereby more and more dependent on the unobstructed coöperation of the organs at the proper time and in the proper way. Insomuch therefore, we may

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

insist, that natural development does not favor higher forms of life in the struggle for existence.

A striving for progress presupposes a goal: but Darwinism is far from attributing to nature a systematic activity; on the contrary, it has tried to uproot the teleological idea that played such a great rôle in earlier philosophy. These philosophers liked to explain what they considered nature's wise method and predestined aims, by referring to a plan arranged providentially from the very beginning, while Darwin proved that expedient results are produced quite independently, without the co-operation of the principle of intention. That which serves a purpose is produced, but purpose is not the cause of its production: there is causality, but not finality. But it must not be forgotten, that the expediency here mentioned is only relative, because it is constantly being measured by its relation to the condition of the environment. When one analyzes the assertion concerning the survival of the most adequate life-forms, it turns out to be in



## NATURE AND MAN

reality a self-repetition, as it does no more than express the indisputable truth that those best equipped for certain conditions of life, have the best prospects of triumphing where those very conditions are present. But regarding the design in these conditions, in a higher sense—in what degree they, taken in their entirety, constitute a good or a bad arrangement—of this we can form no objective opinion. In order to pass judgment on our planetary development, we must be able to draw a parallel, form a comparison with the progress of development on globes whose evolutionary hypotheses accord somewhat with our own. But even then we would not be able to reach the desired conclusion: a final question concerning the plan lying behind the entire universe would arise—a question to which neither optimism nor pessimism is capable of replying but which nothing less than superhuman knowledge of universal aims could undertake to answer. But after all, has the universe any such plan lying behind it? It does not exhibit any in that portion of na-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ture accessible to investigation. What we see in it is at best an external coherence, chains of causes and effects; but it is a play of forces that seem to us to wrestle in the dark. Perhaps we are not capable of finding a deeper meaning simply because we ourselves are afflicted with blindness. But it is a fact that we cannot find one and, to judge from our own experience, we must assume that the conception of design in nature is a purely human mode of thought which indeed has validity for us, but does not apply to nature in the widest meaning of the word. Our lives are so dominated by this conception that our existences are absolutely dependent on it. No wonder then that former generations have stretched it to include the whole of nature. A thousand things give evidence of lack of design; but such an idea is so foreign to our make-up that we with reluctance admit it into our minds.

But when it has once gained firm ground, the lack of harmony between nature and ourselves soon appears to us in its entire scope and we easily agree that a human Demiurgos

## NATURE AND MAN

would never have created a world such as the one that reveals itself to us. He would never have created solar systems only to dissolve them again into *nebulæ*, nor plant growths only to destroy them under the glaciers of the ice-period, nor gigantic animal species only to let them disappear without continuation, nor spirits of genius only to tear them away before they can unfold their powers. A human master-builder would not have evolved such cumbersome machinery working without end or aim. He would have been animated by the spirit that philosophers and others have imagined to be behind nature, but which we look for in vain outside of ourselves. He would have gone to work systematically and economically, in harmony with the formulæ of Leibnitz and Hegel. He would have utilized forces in such a way that the greatest possible results would be obtained by the simplest means and the shortest route. He would have arranged things so that the "higher unities" would become the basis of constantly new evolutions. In other words, he would

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

have provided for an unending progress. Nature on the contrary, shows a perpetual circle: dissolution following development, then again progress, then once more a recoil. It is the bottomless vessel of the Danaïdes, which fills and empties without cease; it is the stone of Sisyphus which is constantly rolled up the mountain only to roll down again at equal pace. A deep meaning lies in the old myth here referred to: it is an imaginative picture of man's dread of the purposeless. Is it not this dread that causes him to cling fast to the hope of regeneration and the belief in immortality? His innermost depths rebel against the thought that all is over when the life-processes end, that he shall have developed and matured, labored, struggled and suffered only for the destruction of the body and of the powers of the soul and only to sink back into the darkness of impersonality. It makes no difference how much we say to ourselves: thus is the way of development. No matter how we twist and turn, the central, the human in us cannot become reconciled to natural de-

## NATURE AND MAN

velopment as it is. What we want is not development, but progress. Development is like the wave that rises, reaches its crest, sinks and disappears; but progress is like the ship for which we set the direction and the speed—the ship that steers towards the goal.

### III

**W**E have now touched on the salient point, the great incompatibility which seems to stand between us and nature in its entirety; between us, who wish to advance, pursue aims, calculate and appraise, and nature who appears to move in a circle, without purpose or object, without consideration of values. We are impelled by a need that causes us to desire more and more as time goes on the very thing that nature otherwise appears to us not to want. The natural development of organisms is passive in as much as it proceeds as an involuntary adaptation of these organisms to given circumstances. It is a necessity, that man has not been able to avoid, if he would; but in addition to this process, there is seen to exist in him—and in him alone—a reverse process, an active advancement, which expresses itself in an adaptation of circumstances

## NATURE AND MAN

to himself and his needs, by means of a consciously purposeful activity. And these needs vary and increase; they do not manifest themselves, as in other living creatures, as permanent indications of species, inextricably bound to physical structure and other conditions of life. Oxen of the present day, if left to themselves, seek no other nourishment than the oxen our forefathers knew and the swallow builds his nest as he did thousands of years ago. All forms of sexual union—promiscuity, polygamy, monogamy—are found represented in the animal kingdom, but each species has its own and there is no example of any species having gone over from indiscriminate marriage to polygamy and thence to monogamy as in human races and states. Bees and ants form extremely complicated combinations, but their regulations are always unvarying and they always act in the same way, while man's social tendencies reveal themselves in the most diverse forms and the laws of a social community often undergo vital changes in a very short time. Undeniably



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

the natural surroundings play a great part in all human development; but environment is not the only element; besides this exterior factor, there exists an inner one—the spiritual tendency to advance.

The more strongly this tendency asserts itself, the more conspicuous does the contrast between man and nature become and the less possible is it for him to come to terms with nature such as it is. He tries to correct its imperfections, to subjugate its forces and press them into his service. He is not content with nourishment in the form that nature offers it, but prepares it as it best suits him. He is not satisfied with the domestic animals and useful plants, that nature puts at his disposal, but produces ameliorative changes in them by breeding and crossing. He has no toleration for the equipment nature has given his own organs, but improves and completes them by all sorts of devices—machines, instruments, artificial methods of conveyance. Process after process originally abandoned to the mercy of nature, he appropriates and subjects

## NATURE AND MAN

to the authority of reason and method. The might of man versus the might of nature—such, in short, is the expression of civilization's formula. While the forces of nature constitute a sum, which always remains like unto itself, the human spirit strives more and more to widen its domain of power. It accomplishes easily and quickly results that nature could not produce without many circuitous and age-long operations, and art can form things to which nature knows no parallel. And just as man remodels life and society in his own image, in that he modifies the conditions about him, so do these react upon him and work changes in him also. The tree of culture has its roots deep in primeval nature, but the off-shoots become more and more remote from their sources. The trunk grows, branches spread. They bear leaves, flowers and fruits. As culture springs up, it brings modifications, that lead man constantly further and further away from the original type. To live, to struggle, to reproduce, these are the instincts common to all organisms. But, in the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

course of time, man has refined them. He lives, but it is not enough for him; he wants to improve his condition, to act and to create. He fights, true enough, but he has made war a science, he has gilded it with an exterior luster and the pathos of great sentiments. He propagates young as do other creatures, but the mating instinct in him passes into erotic passion and this into love. Who knows where culture finally may end? Perhaps the day may come when life shall have become an art, when strife shall take place only between souls and when love has become recreated in a form for which we now have no name, but which is worthy in itself, independently of the rules of reproduction.

Probably no trend of thought has ever followed a false trail more certainly than that which, in our forefathers' days, pointed to a return to a state of nature as the desirable goal. It was based partly on a justifiable dissatisfaction with the defects of social conditions, but partly also on a romantic illusion with respect to nature, which cannot be main-

## NATURE AND MAN

tained under scientific criticism. Not that science can give us any information in regard to nature: this is and will continue to be an enigma. But so much can it say—that there is between us and nature a divergence which has a constant tendency to become wider. As civilization goes forward, we are impelled by ideas, we make use of methods and aspire to ends that separate us more and more from the rest of nature. In truth, the watchword of progress is “away from nature,” whether it is a question of ameliorating the conditions of man or the ennobling of the human individual himself. It seems to me that modern science does not lay enough stress on this growing opposition; it has always been chiefly occupied in proving original coalescence. The emotionalism of the eighteenth century, as well as the scientific investigations of the nineteenth, tried to bring about an approach between nature and man, but, it must be admitted, with the great difference that the former humanized nature, while the latter, so to speak, has naturalized man by referring his psychic mani-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

festations to the activity of the general laws of nature. Now a scientist's pointed emphasis of man's connection with nature is explicable; he is dominated by the thought of the unity underlying Pan-Nature and it is clear that the other point (man's growing incompatibility with the rest of nature) must be, temporarily, forced into the background, as to bring it forward might be misconstrued as a concession to the still powerful dualistic prejudices. But properly viewed and appraised this point seems easily reconcilable with monistic points of view. If we were to construe this condition of opposition so that nature and man appeared to face each other as hostile powers, we should indeed be guilty of an unscientific opinion, equally mythological as the one that represents nature as our good and wise mother. The opposition arises simply from the circumstance that man, without ceasing to be a part of Pan-Nature, at the same time separates himself from the other parts, develops his peculiarities and thereby becomes involved in tendencies which it becomes more

## NATURE AND MAN

and more momentous for him to follow, while within nature, in its entirety, these tendencies continue as unessential as before.

The ostensible "antimonistic practice" I mentioned above is likewise owing to a process of differentiation. But now such a thing in itself is indeed no unusual phenomenon, but on the contrary one that is seen on every hand, one of those modalities, under which all development takes place. The element that is peculiar to human differentiation is that it can express itself in the form of active progress. But this peculiarity also can be explained. Of the two chief factors that determine organic development—individuality and environment—we must assume that in man individuality has in the course of events obtained a unique advantage, acquired a surplus of energy which impels it to assert itself, to unfold itself and influence surroundings in accordance with its aims. It is in this that what we call progress, consists; as progress is nothing more than a continuation of development in a direction serviceable to the end in view and human ends



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

are determined by human individuality, in that they are a striving after a realization of the possibilities and demands of our nature. We cannot see that this conjecture in regard to the genesis of our progress, is opposed to a monistic conception, simply because there is no counterpart in the nature lying about us. It is not concerned with a sudden leap, but a slow transition: we see it in the present race of man, where the principle of individuality appears in very different degrees, beginning with tribes where it is so weak that it can scarcely be discovered. In any case, the distance between passive development and active progress is no greater than that that separates organic and inorganic nature, whose unity monism, in spite of a lack of reliable connecting links, does not scruple to proclaim as an article of faith. And however that may be, the growing divergence between man and the rest of nature is indisputably a fact and an intelligent monism would not be inconsistent in acknowledging these successive removals as well as the original coalescence; for the two hypotheses are in reality



## NATURE AND MAN

both based on the same principles of development.

Theoretically therefore they have equal justification; but in regard to their practical value, the difference is great, for, while the study of human peculiarity gives us a guiding hand in understanding the goal towards which we must strive; the representation of man's cohesion with nature as such is fairly insignificant. When Haeckel refers all human spiritual activity to functions of the brain, germs of which are even now found in the higher forms of animals, and, in this connection, speaks of monistic ethics, monistic æsthetics and so on, his proof of the common origin has certainly an interest for us, but yet only a retrospective one. Even though one may see an artistic element in the birds' play, a moral element in the mutual helpfulness of bees, a religious element in the dog's affection for and obedience to his master, the knowledge does not advance either art, morals or religion one inch. And yet it is upon this that everything depends—the essential for us is not the point

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

from which we came, but the point to which we can reach. It is comparatively unimportant to acquire information in regard to the animalistic pedigree of our spiritual qualities; but it is extremely important to render an account of the fact that we have the power (that animals do not possess) of developing these qualities and of learning what direction the development would take. Just as a genius is not judged by the nineteen-twentieths he has in common with other people: but by the one-twentieth that constitutes his originality, so should man, the genius of creation, as we flatter ourselves we are, be especially observed in the light of the peculiarities, which separates him from the rest of nature. And just as it is absurd to apply to the man of genius the common standards of daily life in general, so is it preposterous for modern science, partly hypnotized by the name monism, to emphasize unity to such a degree that human life is unconditionally classified under the formulæ of natural law, simply because it can be proved that these formulæ apply to all other forms of

## NATURE AND MAN

existence. Such a view might easily result in the most unreasonable reaction. Examine the law of the survival of the best adapted forms of life; this one, if any, might seem universal. Now what knowledge can we humans derive from this law? A famous explorer, who is at the same time a scientist, lately in a treatise on *Science and Ethics* answered the question thus: "We should use all the energy we possess, to adapt the organism to the environment and not waste it in meaningless efforts to adapt the environment to the organism." It is undeniable that this rule of life corresponds to our knowledge of natural selection in general: the chief point with plants and animals is to accommodate themselves to exterior circumstances and those, that cannot do this, are doomed to destruction. But no less undeniable is it, that if man had exclusively followed the same rule, if he in most respects had not gone exactly the opposite way, he would never have advanced to a stage of culture. When our forefathers learned to build houses, to train animals and improve

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

plant-growth, they were actuated by the desire to adapt environment to the uses of organic life. And this line: not to content oneself with things as they are, but, on the contrary, to reform them in accordance with the needs of man—it runs like a red thread through all the history of progress; it can be traced from the most primitive attempts at improving human conditions up to the most elevated endeavors in the domain of spiritual life. Have not the elect of mankind, the epoch-makers and reformers, during all time, been those who did not respect conditions and environment, but conquered them and fashioned them in accordance with their idealistic aims?

This is not the place to expand this thought; the relevant point is to show that all human phenomena cannot be narrowed down to the established analogies of natural law. It may happen that the analogy does not hit the mark, that the formula explodes; but on that account one must not assume an illegality; it is only a case of differentiation, an unfolding of human peculiarities. And this should neither be

## NATURE AND MAN

overlooked nor explained away; one should attempt to get to the bottom of it, to the best of one's ability. For it is a plausible supposition that that which constitutes human singularity, is just the part of our being that should be encouraged. As a rule, it is in what is characteristic that we find what is worthy. The superiority of a rose, in our eyes, consists in those qualities that distinguish it from other flowers and the horticulturist's efforts are not directed towards obliterating these qualities by driving them back to a common type, but, on the contrary, to force them more to the foreground so that the rose becomes even more a rose than it was before. Likewise should the task of culture be to make man more and more man-like. Of course, in order to attain this object, a deeper insight into human nature is of the greatest importance. We should try to penetrate its mysteries dwelling in our own depths, thus enabling ourselves to observe and understand sympathetically that that dwells in those of our own kind. In addition to this direct and empiric study, which will always be the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

chief source of our comprehension, we shall find natural science also an advantageous assistance, but only indirectly, in that it informs us of human peculiarity in no other way than by comparison and antithesis.

#### IV

**I**T is certainly not my intention to under-rate the scope of natural science. It has accomplished great things and is going to accomplish still greater. Its theoretical researches widen our intellectual horizon, its technical applications reshape our material conditions and thereby influence our economical, social and political life. And while it makes individuals more intelligent and creates possibilities of higher forms of social existence, its influence is outlining an enormous periphery in whose territory its encroachment is often deep. But there is a center to which it never reaches, a human center of gravity, which it cannot shake. Even though it may change our conditions of existence, even though it may change our picture of the world, it scarcely affects our view of life at all. As soon as there is a question of the practical crit-



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

icism of human life and its conditions, we no longer construe things from a natural-scientific point of view, but we make them the object of human valuation. This dualism has already been spoken of in the foregoing pages. The subject is now ripe enough to be taken up again and I shall attempt to bring still more light to the question by the help of an example that will show more effectively than all logic, the nature and cause of this incompatibility.

The example is by chance drawn from scientific circles. It will be remembered how Pierre Curie's death or rather the circumstances which caused it, aroused the greatest stir and sensation every place. His name, connected as it was with the discovery of radium, had recently become celebrated all over the world; he was young and, judging from everything, still capable of redeeming the richest promises. And so it happened one day, that when he was trying to cross a very crowded street, he collided with a wagon, fell under the wheels and was killed on the spot. And in the observations in the press, in con-

## NATURE AND MAN

versations, occasioned by the circumstance, there was one outcry constantly repeated; "what a tragic loss, what a meaningless fate." Now if one were to imagine a man who likes to apply consistently the natural-scientific, the monistic view of the world to the phenomena of human life, how would he take a case like this? I think that he would have to express himself in about the following way: "They say that the occurrence is meaningless—far from it: it is, on the contrary, justified in the most satisfactory way. With the direction that both objects took, Curie and the wagon, it was unavoidable that they should meet at a point of intersection. Further if one estimates their respective force and power of resistance, it is clear that Curie would have to be knocked down. And if one remembers with what great weight the wheels pressed on certain of his organs and of what importance these organs are for the preservation of life, it is obvious that death must follow. In short, the catastrophe is in perfect harmony with the principles of mathematics, mechanics and physiology. It

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

cost the life of a distinguished scientist; but to count this as a loss is a prejudice; for in reality, nothing in the universe is entirely lost. According to the law of the conservation of matter, not even a slight part of energy or of substance can be obliterated—neither the atom of a brain nor the energy of a mind. By Curie's death, only the individual form which clothed his nervous system and the personal soul which represented its work, disappeared. The complex connections of the nervous system pass into other combinations when dissolved, and the living powers it produced simply become transplanted to other forms of movement."

As consistent as this line of reasoning is, it appears to us no less paradoxical, and it gives only a new evidence of how inapplicable to human affairs the yard stick of natural law sometimes can be. It is also improbable that even the most confirmed monist would express himself thus on this particular occasion; even though his logic might uphold the opinion *in abstracto*, his feeling would decline to give it

## NATURE AND MAN

validity *in concreto*. But if it were to be advanced, the champion of the purely human view of life would not be embarrassed for an answer. He would reply in this wise: "My opponent's argument is well-known to me. What he expresses in regard to loss and death in general is, word for word, taken from Haeckel. It is true, Haeckel never proved his assertion that that which is called soul can be transplanted into another form. No experiment up to this time has proven that when an organism is dissolved, that when living powers disappear, a corresponding increase of inorganic energy takes place. However I shall overlook this weakness in the monistic system and without more ado, assume that nothing in nature is lost, that when a material or a force, the spiritual included, apparently perishes, it is only to take another form. But—and now comes the decisive objection—this teaching in regard to the conservation of matter is concerned only with the quantitative side of the affair. But besides this, there is a qualitative element; from a human point of view, masses

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of matter that are equally large are not on that account equally valuable. What sort of combinations they form themselves into or whether a certain amount of matter and energy is spread in the earth and atmosphere or whether it is condensed in one rare personality is not a matter of indifference to us. As far as the special combination called individual is concerned, the loss is irreparable, in that when it is once gone, it will never return in the same form. This irreparableness comes home to us all the more when unusually well-equipped individuals are concerned. Therefore we look upon Curie's death as a real loss and that occurrence which caused it continues to seem meaningless to us notwithstanding the proof of its mathematical, mechanical and physiological necessity. When it is a question of human fate, we are not content with the bare, naked reference to causes and effects. It is not enough for us that we can substantiate a fact, we wish also to appraise it, that is to say we wish to discover in the exterior coherence, an inner consistency between that which hap-

## NATURE AND MAN

pens and him to whom it happens. This consistency we cannot find in the case in hand. It is denuded of every element of valuation. The useless destruction of a precious human creature, the brutal crushing under a senseless wagon wheel of an infinitely fine organism, a misfortune befalling the very one who least deserves it—all this offends, at one and the same time, our economic, our æsthetic and our moral sense. To comprise it all in one word, it is at variance with our sense of proportion, and in this respect we characterize the occurrence as meaningless.”

In natural processes not a trace of such proportion can be found. In them, a human creature seems to have no more significance than an ephemera, and the Macedonian Alexander is at the mercy of fate, no less than the lowest infusoria. From every germ that shoots up into a giant tree, there are thousands of others that are either killed or stunted by unfavorable conditions, although perhaps they may have borne within themselves the same power—indeed who knows!



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

Perhaps still greater possibilities. Many are called but few are chosen and those not always the most excellent. But also in social processes, the course of things often agrees only indifferently with the demands of valuation. It may be repeated to this very day—that which is in the Preacher's book: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Translated to modern speech, the thought can be expressed thus: happiness and tribulation, glory and obscurity, everything is chance, in science, in industry, in politics. Trivial conditions cause great characters and geniuses to remain inactive, while mediocre ones are permitted to execute the great deeds of history and to have an influence on the course of culture. Circumstances are stronger than personalities and the impotence of individuals is the tragedy of every day life. The Jewish wise man saw it; but human creatures, in gen-



## NATURE AND MAN

eral, are so made that they decline to acknowledge their dependence on blind and deaf chance. It has been a necessity for them to construct an imaginary world-order, where the capable reach their goal and the incompetent are shown back to the place where they belong. They cannot fail to see that evil powers sometimes get the upper hand. But they like to believe that life is like the popular comedy: even though inferiority may seem to triumph in the third act, and things look very doubtful in the fourth, the worthy man unfailingly triumphs in the fifth. Has not the schoolmaster told them anyhow that genius, "true" genius, always makes its way through all difficulties? And they pounce with avidity on every phenomenon that argues in favor of the existence of this system. It is quite natural that they should be tempted to rely on this, for history is, above all things, the saga of the fortunate—it has nothing to recount of the obscure geniuses, the unknown heroes. But now and then, it undeniably happens that talent and circumstances meet in perfect communion. The

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

most striking example of this is seen in Napoleon's career with the exception of its last phases, and the attraction which his life has exercised over men's minds, certainly is due, in large part, to this harmony. All harmony produces satisfaction, and the harmony which expresses itself between power and success, between will and fate is valued that much more highly because it rarely appears in real life.

It is just the same with the idea of a Nemesis, an equalizing justice. In this connection another place in the Bible may be referred to, where it speaks of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children. This is retaliation, but of a kind, the justification of which we, of the present day, will scarcely acknowledge. The conception that the suffering of the innocent may expiate the fault of the guilty, belongs to a material and by-gone way of thinking. For example we cannot see any reasonableness in that dispensation of Providence by which the good-natured Louis XVI was forced to make amends on the scaffold for the mistakes and crimes which were almost all

## NATURE AND MAN

committed under his predecessors. We would find it more just if they themselves had been given this penal sentence; but to them was granted the privilege of dying in their beds. Nowadays perhaps we might have patience with this sort of retaliation as an imperfect but unavoidable arrangement, if we could only show its practical general application. But this one cannot do by any means. There is any number of evidences of the fact that the sins of the fathers can be extremely advantageous to their children. If one were to examine the origin of certain royal houses, noble races and millionaire families, the source of their power, their privileges and their wealth, one would be able to put together a register of sins that would form a collection as complete as could well be demanded. But it is not to be discovered that the descendants concerned have not as a rule profited greatly by the results of these sins. The misdeeds of the forefathers have borne splendid fruit in the comfort, the esteem and the influence which their descendants enjoy. A democratic long-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ing for a Nemesis consoles itself by thinking that the members of such races are more exposed to the danger of degeneration. But this is only one of those current articles of faith in which repetition takes the place of proof. Degenerate individuals appear in all classes, but of course those that have a prominent position are more noticed than others. If one could obtain comparative statistics, it would certainly be seen that the per cent. of deterioration among the proletariat is by no means less than in the highest circles of society. And here I touch upon the subject of "physical justice," that justice which nature is supposed to have taken upon herself to maintain, in that she is supposed to punish the fathers' sins by the misery of the children. If any sort of justice is to be seen in this, its administration is certainly very peculiar. In the first place it is not vice alone that is punished by diseased offspring: quite innocent poverty, accompanied by undernourishment and unhealthy dwellings, can produce similar results. And in the next place, there is one awkward thing with those

## NATURE AND MAN

vices that we are here considering. In one of Maeterlinck's essays, in which he goes into this question, he draws attention to the fact that the retaliation referred to, limits itself to the possible, but by no means certain results of drunkenness and sexual dissipation. So we see that it has a limited field of action and what is more it affects weakness rather than real sins. A father can commit as many crimes as he wants to, he can murder, steal, cheat to his heart's content, without leaving the least injury on his children's organism. It is sufficient that he takes care to do nothing to injure his health; if he only observes hygienic care, his issue need not fear nature's retaliation.

No, justice is not to be found in nature; it lives in us ourselves, its native soil is the human consciousness. But if this be so, one will ask: why is the proportion between merit and award so imperfect in human society? For the simple reason that this society is under the subjection of human standards in certain respects only. Even the best arranged communities lead an amphibious existence, they are

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

still standing with one foot in a state of nature, in that they in many, too many, conditions of life, let things shift for themselves. It is our task to narrow still more the latitude of this hazard. Every technical, every social step forward is planned for the purpose of correcting and limiting the arbitrariness of chance. We humans do not wish to be mere creatures to whom something *happens*, whom something or other *befalls*; the whole source of culture lies in this feeling. The ideal future would be one where such an expression as "chance" would be omitted from our dictionaries. Of course human beings will never reach so far and without doubt they will never be able to avert completely the meaninglessness of nature, such as that that reveals itself in the death of a genius. But they will be able to regulate and master many conditions of nature, in which we are now mere playthings and in the purely social domain, they will be capable of introducing regulations in which the element of valuation will have a more rightful place than it now has.



## V

**B**UT in order to approach this goal they must be above all things exacting. The road to it does not lead through an easily contented optimism which sees a higher directing power behind the life of communities, just as it thinks it can discover in nature a principle of goodness and wisdom. Perhaps one remembers the anecdote about the lay-preacher who described to his listeners how wisely Providence had looked after the interests of communication by arranging that most large towns should be situated on navigable rivers. There is a certain science, called the science of history, which reasons somewhat after the same fashion. Everywhere that it finds a wise arrangement, it spies after an original aim which has guided the course of affairs. In this it differs from another branch of knowledge, with which it is sometimes confounded, from sociology, which is content with tracing causes



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

and therefore would conclude among other things that towns which are laid out on navigable rivers have more chances of becoming the centers of trade and commerce than some others that are not so fortunately situated. This conclusion is indeed a very natural one; but the simple methods are not always the ones that are applied from the beginning: in the domains of both scientific theory and practical invention, it is most often to be observed that long and devious windings are made before one reaches a solution which proves after all to have lain on the surface. And when it is a question of the explanation of historical phenomena, there is, in addition, a psychological factor from whose influence very few of us can free ourselves: the confusing influence of the accomplished fact. The interpretation is made in accordance with the realities lying before us: this is a physical adjustment which can be verified elsewhere also. For example, in the pre-Darwinian view of nature. Adherents of this view observed, in the different plant and animal species, what seemed to them

## NATURE AND MAN

an admirable suitability to the surrounding conditions of life and they interpreted this as a preordained harmony: it was clear to them that the environment was arranged with a view to the needs of the organism. Things are likely to appear in the same light when one looks back on a finished division of the history of a country. The development of incidents seems so consistent, every link seems to fit so inevitably into what has gone before and what comes after, that most people cannot imagine any other course of events. They wonder over the fact that the circumstances were arranged beforehand and the idea of a guiding thought on which the whole process has rested from the very beginning, rises involuntarily. Now if we widen the scope of this observation from the simple fate of the people to the so-called history of the world, we arrive at the philosophy of history. It has been forcibly said of this philosophy that all its systems have this in common, that they find, each in its own age, the impressive final chord of history. In other words: the foundation

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

principle from which they reason is to be found in the results of the contemporaneous age. And as the facts which are to establish the correctness of this principle, consist of a number of events which have led to these same results, of course the most beautiful agreement is reached; but it undoubtedly rests on a *circulus vitiosus*.

Sociology, which makes no claim to understanding the aim of development, but confines itself to pointing out and grouping social conditions of cause and effect, is, in regard to method, in better harmony with the demands of science. It stands in the same relation to the philosophy of history as the modern interpretation of nature stands to the earlier one. In natural science they have got past the point of looking for an aim behind the phenomena, with which they are concerned. No astronomer, who has not got a screw loose, questions any more the aim of the movements of the globes, just as little as the geologist worries about the deeper meaning in the formation of mountains or the physicist about

## NATURE AND MAN

that in electric forces. Why then should the historian seek a providence behind phenomena, for example like the French Revolution or England's colonial power or the dynasty of the Hohenzollerns. One should leave that sort of speculation to intellectual dilettanti and professional patriots. We all know about those historical missions that are supposed to have selected this or that nation for special prosperity and for great works. When several races appropriate this prerogative, it is not easy to decide which one of them is the supreme elect. As a rule the question is answered in this wise, that it is that race which has produced the prophet who is speaking and the public to whom he is making his appeal. This patriotic confession will unfailingly bring applause and give the impression that the speaker or writer is a man with his heart in the right place. To repeat this in season and out of season therefore cannot be too highly recommended to all those who wish to make a career. But let us agree that the matter has nothing to do with science.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

Indeed it is to be seen every day in private life, how many powers go to ruin without having been used, how arbitrarily the good things of the world are distributed, how fortune and misfortune befall irrespective of merit, what a plaything each one of us is for the caprices of chance. No wise direction can be discovered in individual fates: why should it then come into activity when the common existence of society is concerned? This would have to mean that the hundreds of thousands of meaninglessnesses in individual life, would, in the aggregate, come to constitute a higher wisdom. But neither is any glimpse of this to be seen, if one observes the progress of history without prejudice. Why, must we ask, why these masses of crimes, these mountains of injustice, these crowds of physical and mental sufferings to which race after race have been obliged to submit? Why these wasted forces, these frustrated attempts, this oft-repeated destruction of civilizations, this infinity of hindrances which have eternally stood in the way of all progress? Were these

## NATURE AND MAN

cruel and devious means necessary for the attainment of this paltry advantage and could not this have been reached in a less immoral and, to speak plainly, less unpractical way? And yet one still hears Providence and a world-plan spoken of. Any half-way intelligent schoolboy could point out the absurdities, if his reasoning powers had been trained to healthy disrespect, instead of being led astray by pedagogical dogmas. To see a system in history is really to show it too much honor. The system is to be found only in the human brain, which has an inclination to transfer its own sense of order to things and conditions outside of itself.

It is true enough that, notwithstanding all checks and recoils, history, on the whole, exhibits progress; we who live to-day have undeniably reached further than our ancestors in most respects. But in order to explain this progress one does not need to assume the mediation of an extraneous power. For what is progress? In a foregoing chapter, I have defined it as a realizing of the possibilities and



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

demands of our nature. There is nothing remarkable in the fact that a human creature tries to realize his own potentiality: it is rather more remarkable that this effort forces its way with such difficulty. Naturally it would be idle to be hypercritical of history, for it appears chiefly as a natural process and as such is necessarily cumbered with imperfections. And we ought to judge it on the chief points as a natural process, judge it without admiration but also without indignation, drawing from it only the conclusions that we can use to advantage. We do not quarrel with floods or storms, but of course it is another matter that we can try to prevent the damages they cause. The arbitrariness of natural processes must be regulated by conscious activity. In historical life human creatures have been more or less like "floating vessels that run foul of each other," to use a Goethian comparison, and progress depends upon our taking the rudder in our own hands as far as possible. Heaven does not make lightning conductors for us, the sea does not raise embankments,



## NATURE AND MAN

and "development" cannot be said to take pains to satisfy our ideals. That there may be forces and powers in the secret-laden atmosphere that surrounds us, that exercise an influence on our fate, is a possibility which cannot be denied. But as they, at all events are beyond our powers of perception, we must leave the unknown world alone as practically indifferent to us, and try to interpret the phenomena of life about us by the help of factors that are accessible to experience. Therefore the only providence that reveals itself, lies in ourselves: in our maintenance of the human over the natural.

## VI

THE dictum that we should try to get away from a state of nature, implies another, as a consequence—that we should strive to reach its opposite. But in what does this consist? If one is questioned about it he will answer: the opposite of nature is culture. Or, perhaps: the opposite of nature is art. Both answers are obvious, both are in agreement with antithetical usage of language, only with this difference that the first is more exhaustive, while the other is more directly elucidative. Culture includes all human effort in the highest sense and art is only a single manifestation of this; but, it must be acknowledged, the latter is excellently adapted to illustrate the state of opposition, especially when it is taken in a wider meaning, including both the artificial and the artistic. The artificial makes amends for nature's ex-

## NATURE AND MAN

terior insufficiency, the artistic supplies its lack of inner coherence. It is just on account of its lack of coherence that life, as we see it about us, the life both of individuals and of society, offends us at every step. Causes and effects stand in no reasonable relation to each other. Fortune and misfortune, punishment and reward strike blindly, they are distributed at random. The threads of Fate are cut in the most purposeless manner, and historical processes which appear consistent to us, are interrupted in the midst of their progress without visible cause. Individuals are placed outright in situations that are in the most absurd or most regrettable opposition to their powers and inclinations. Great events often take place at most inconvenient moments and conversely, fail to appear just when they may be needed. And human beings ask what they can make of this confusion; for be it for better or for worse, they are creatures, for whom it is not sufficient that something or other happens: there must also be some meaning behind it. If they are religious natures, they will be

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

content in their belief that events, no matter how inexplicable they may be, are always an expression of a higher will or wisdom. If they are philosophically inclined, they will invent a system and try to force the phenomena into its categories. But even if they are neither of the two, if they suspect that there is no meaning in things and, therefore, can make no headway in the world, as it is, nevertheless there is always a last resort left them: they can move into another world to which they give a meaning and where their ideals can be realized. This more perfect world is the artistic. Life is disproportion, chaos, arbitrariness; art is balance, symmetry, conformity to law. As such it fills a need, which life is incapable of satisfying. It obliterates the brutal play of blind chance, it gives liberty of action to forces and possibilities to which life does not grant the chance of coming into their rights. Beethoven, lonely and unhappy as he was, found in music the purer and more beautiful world that reality denied him; but Goethe, too, though exterior conditions ap-

## NATURE AND MAN

peared to him in a marvelously harmonious form, nevertheless confessed that he had drained life's cup to the full only in his poetic productivity. For these chosen spirits, art was their proper homestead; but in addition to these privileged ones, there are numerous others, who resort to it to help themselves to surmount life's contradictions and defects. Art reveals life to us as it should be. If the natural process that life is, for the most part, could ever be organized in such a way that existence should be recreated in the image of humanity, then art would be superfluous: for life itself would have become art.

If we wish to account for the opposition between art and reality, we need only to examine a drama, a realistic one, if we like, for even such a one will mark the profound difference. The action of the play is a unity from which all inessential elements have been extracted. United in a systematic whole, its acts proceed from introduction to crisis and thence to the solution. And this solution is a logical consequence of the peculiarities of the characters

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

and their conflict with given conditions. In reality things seldom or never take place in this way. In the first place, there is scarcely ever seen action of such a pure culture, to speak biologically, as that of the drama: events of real life are constantly crossed by disturbing bi-circumstances. In the next place, neither do the conflicts of life always lead to a definite result: they just as often cease and come to nothing. And finally, even though it should come to a result, it is not certain that this will answer to that of the play, where the tragic figure must atone for his violation of written or unwritten law, or where the chief person of the comedy acknowledges his wickedness and promises to make amends and do better in the future. Of course we do not mean to maintain that all plays end with the triumph of reason, truth and justice. There are those that, on the contrary, show us the defeat of those powers and in this respect it seems to us that such a typical play as Henri Becques' *Ravens* is especially true to life just on account of its disconsolateness. But while

## NATURE AND MAN

it is true to life, if we look more closely, we will see that it gives us something more than a picture of reality. We cannot doubt for a moment whence the author wishes to lead us; he has adjusted the elements of the piece in a way that forces us to this observation: "This is the way the society we live in looks," and then the conclusion: "It should be otherwise." The play with a dark view of life really is different from the drama with the atonement ending only in method. The method of the first is indirect and negative, that of the second direct and positive; the first criticises that which is, the second constructs it as it should be. But what is common to both is the idealizing tendency which points to the imperfection of real life.

On the whole, one can talk as much as one will of naturalism in art, yet it will always be only a question of the manner of presentation; for according to its very nature all art that deserves the name will be idealistic. Of course it must work with natural elements and inasmuch its connection with nature does not



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

suffer interruption. But on the other side, it maintains its own self-assertiveness in that it selects, twists and reshapes these elements, in that it groups them into a whole which it fills with its own spirit. This freedom of art shows itself most clearly in music, which certainly no one will attempt to explain as a sheer imitation of natural sound. The musical creative power is not dependent on exterior models, it breeds within its own depths self-existent values, and musical receptiveness, the moods that are awakened by sound and rhythm, by the rise and fall of tones, by harmony and dissonance, have their deepest roots in the human being himself, in the peculiarities of our species. The arts of painting and poetry are not so abstract: they are more bound to exterior conditions than music is. But the idealizing tendency which reaches beyond nature always manifests itself. Nature shows us only fragments, art collects these fragments into an entity. Both in nature and art a choice takes place; but the natural one consists in an unconscious adaptation to pre-

## NATURE AND MAN

vious circumstances, without consideration of their value or justification, whilst the artistic is founded on an effort which is dominated by an overmastering feeling and aims at an idealization of given phenomena. Goethe is said to have remarked about Claude Lorraine's paintings that they possessed the highest truth, but no trace of reality. The expression contains the entire quintessence of art. Behind the phenomena's multiplicity the artist catches glimpses of a unity; behind the confusion, a coherence; behind the forms, an idea; behind the casual, the essential. The artist's task lies in separating the essential and making it real for us. When the sculptor purposely emphasizes a single line in a portrait-bust in order to reveal to us the nature of the original in his characteristic feature, when the poet in drawing a type borrows lineaments from different living models which he blends into a single figure, it can certainly be said that the artist is not keeping strictly to reality, but it is exactly this method of representation that lends striking truth to the work. It will

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

be true, provided that it is successful in catching the essential. Indeed the artist can present the unreal to us and yet give us truth. The mysterious light that shines in Rembrandt's pictures and which has set the fancy and the brushes of so many in motion, is to be found nowhere in nature. But it beamed in the soul of the master and we others who observe his work have a feeling that this light is significant of something which for him was an essential. Whether that which is called the essential has an independent existence, whether it dwells in things themselves, is a question which none can decide. At any rate, as an idea it lives in our own depths and this condition is sufficient to give the art, that is one of the modes of expressing this idea, the right to be.

I say, one of the modes of expression: for just as light and heat, electricity and magnetism are closely allied manifestations of a single power-group, so are art and science, religion and morals, economics and technics no more than special applications of the univers-

## NATURE AND MAN

ally human principle of the essential. It is also seen that their spheres are constantly coming in contact with each other. When religion personifies the source of all things by the God-image, which it equips with the most perfect qualities, by this individualization it is making use of an artistic element. But also science has a woof of art wherever it reaches to a more advanced stage, whenever it rises superior to a mere search for facts and attempts to survey circumstances as a whole. In a way, every scientific system is an architectonic work of art. Neither the scientist nor the artist lets things remain as they are, both strive to collect scattered elements into a whole. With the philosopher this unity will find expression in abstract conceptions, with the poet it will condense itself into an action, a destiny or a typical figure; but the one, just as well as the other will give us a glimpse of the coherence of things. It is true, it is only by glimpses that the poetic symbol illumines this ensemble over which philosophical thought casts an even clearness; but it advances the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

knowledge of the true in a no less degree on that account. For science is not alone in desiring truth and to be willing to limit the domain of art to beauty is a narrow method of observation. Between the true and the beautiful, there is no distinct line of demarcation, just as there is none between the beautiful and the useful. Artistic arrogance has looked down upon the useful and in so doing has forgotten that its foundation principle—the attainment of the greatest effect by the simplest means—is exactly the same as that which the artist must observe in case he wishes to create a masterpiece. The ponderous, the purposeless, the superfluous inessentials affect us painfully, whether they appear in a drama, a symphony, an economic system or a technical invention. But, on the other hand, even a prosaic machine may give an impression of beauty, when it acts without visible waste of forces and in the most perfect possible harmony between the work and its result. There is another domain, that of morals, which many have wished strictly to separate from that of

## NATURE AND MAN

art. The old Greeks did not do so: their untranslatable "*kalokagathia*" comprised in one word the beautiful and the good. And the relation between ethics and æsthetics cannot be denied. What offends us in a crime is above all its monstrosity, whether it be the incongruity between the energy summoned and the miserable aim upon which strength is squandered, or the incongruity between the worthlessness of the criminal and the significance of the good which he has succeeded in destroying. This accounts for the fact that nobility of aim can justify an act which would otherwise be considered criminal, and likewise that it is easier for us to forgive certain crimes, when they are committed by great personalities. For the sight of an unusually well-equipped individual awakens an æsthetic feeling of pleasure which is sometimes more effective than the ethical repugnance his actions are calculated to arouse. It happens also that qualities which seem objectionable in everyday life, for example, egoism and hardheartedness, impress and unconsciously attract us when they dis-



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

play themselves in enormous dimensions, because these are in agreement with the greatness of the figure and complete its wholeness. As we see, the question of proportion plays a decisive rôle in such things. In fact it does so in all the modifications of morals, in the social, judicial and political domains. A sense of justice is nothing else than a desire for proportion between merit and lot, positive right is founded on a balance between utilitarian considerations and the demand for fairness, and statecraft wishes or at least pretends to wish, to bring about harmony between the various interests of society, of its groups and of its individuals.

Can we therefore maintain that the consciousness of right, law-giving, polity, morals in general, rest on a basis of art? Not if the word art is limited to its purely æsthetic feeling. In that case, the statement would be limited and one could just as easily maintain the assertion that art is an off-shoot of morals because it can exercise an ennobling and soul-purifying influence. One could, with the same



## NATURE AND MAN

right, defend opinions like these: that religion is synonymous with philosophy because they both agree in their effort to show a coherence in existence, or that philosophy is of the nature of religion because it seeks that which religion believes itself to have discovered—the permanent element in phenomena's shifting mass. What would be correct would be not to place any of these categories in a relation of dependence to another, but to consider them all coequal revelations of a single law of nature: the longing to find and realize the essential. The essential is described by different names, it is sometimes called the ideal, sometimes the kernel of things or the inner agreement or the higher unity. It evinces itself in the life of the feelings, in thought, in all purposeful activity and seems to have a Proteus-like multiplicity of forms. Pythagoras saw it in numbers, Raphael gave it expression in the harmony of forms and color, Napoleon wished to realize it in his own existence. My old mathematics teacher undoubtedly got a glimpse of it when he rejoiced

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

in the "elegant" solution of an equation, and the lover is unconsciously seeking it when he, out of lines and movements, out of the play of expression on a face, the beaming of a pair of eyes, the softness of a voice, out of words which he makes into more than words, constructs a figure which answers to his longing. It can be comprehended and seized from dissimilar sides, from the metaphysical, the moral, the artistic or the technical-economic, and is then called, according to circumstances, the true or the good, the beautiful or the useful. But rightly viewed these conceptions are only facets of one and the same diamond.

In taking art as the point of departure and comparison, it was not with the idea of giving it a precedence in regard to importance in human life. The widening and elevating of our lives which is the object of the sum total of our aims, can be just as effectively forwarded by other means of activity. But although the results of these are just as valuable, as a rule they are not won with the same ease as the artistic. Science is bound to facts, religion is

## NATURE AND MAN

encumbered with prejudices, technics have natural hindrances with which to struggle, statecraft must make its way between mutually opposing interests and power-conditions. On the other hand, in the artistic domain, the difficulties coming from without are limited to a minimum, indeed sometimes it is not necessary for them to assert themselves at all. The artist works with the lightest and most willing material, with words and tones and colors and forms, and the opposition he meets, in reality only lies in his own limitation, in the inadequacy of his powers to realize his idea. Where the power is present in sufficiency, the artist is sovereign, more sovereign than any other creating spirit. The human being cannot expand himself in such perfect liberty in any other direction, cannot be so wholly and entirely himself. Therefore art more than all other activities reveals the purely human in us and therefore it is also typical of the human tendency in general, of our struggle to attain the essential. It above all others gives evidence of our peculiarity, it informs us of the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

quality of our condition of opposition to nature and gives us a hint of the goal which the longing for progress should set for itself.

## VII

**I**T is superfluous to emphasize the significance that a reliable and generally-recognized standard for human values would have. The human being's mere instinct of what its nature demands, is not infallible; it is often obscured by preconceived opinions and other circumstances. As to what constitutes progress, opinions really agree only in the domain of discoveries and inventions; in the intellectual-scientific sphere they are already divided, and in that of politics they are constantly in opposition. And yet it is just here that a wise common standard would be desirable, for politics is the factor whose interference in human conditions is always the most comprehensive and not rarely the most perceptible. However there are those who seem to deny outright the possibility of finding such a standard. Where is there a criterion for the correctness

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of politics? asks Gumplowicz in his *Sociology*, (by the way, one of the most instructive textbooks I know). And he answers: no criterion can be set up in advance. Not until after a policy has been successful does it appear as the correct one. Hellwald in his *History of Culture* takes a similar standpoint. He does not believe in the transforming power of reforms. No laws nor regulations, he says, can prevent the elements of society from taking the same attitude toward each other as the millstone and the grain. Human beings exchange places, new martyrs appear in place of the old ones, forms change, but the creature remains the same. Struggling for existence is the normal state of human beings, the struggle is everlasting.

In such expressions, which are by no means rare, it is easy to trace the influence of natural science. It is the Darwinian natural-selection theory, which has exercised an especially strong influence on the opinion that many have of society. In state-life, it has been appropriated for so-called practical politics and in



## NATURE AND MAN

economic life for so-called free competition. Now practical politics with its application of the maxims, proclaiming that might makes right and that it is necessary to adapt oneself to the given environment, are certainly the social pendant to the biological process which may be observed in the plant and animal kingdoms. But it has been proven by some one that this process is imperfect from our point of view, because the superiority, which can only be measured by its relation to casual previous circumstances, offers no warrant for inner justification. The same objection can be made to practical politics, and indeed this is rejected time after time, by human idealism, which is the most distinguished support of progress. As far as free competition is concerned, it is a mistake to refer to nature, as an example. The struggle of the organisms is not free, but marked by pressure, is forced to submit to the inexorableness of chance, and its results are partially determined by undeserved difficulties or no less undeserved facilities. It is not very different in human society, where

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

that condition which a national-economic school has honored with the name "free competition" is usually a caricature of freedom. A really free competition, in other words, a rivalry under exactly equal external conditions, appears only exceptionally. Candidates for examination, participants in a duel, parties in a betting match and gambling are usually placed on the same footing. Otherwise very little is seen of equality at the starting place; in the great social race it is far from being so. But possibly it will be some day. Formal political equality has already been established in many countries and there are persevering movements on foot to complete these efforts by a still more effective equality in social chances. Our modern social politics would offer a very doubtful foundation for predictions if it were only the reform of a day that many consider it to be. But it has an ancestry that can be traced back to ancient history, though only in sporadic manifestations. The tendency seems new to us only because it, for the first time, shows itself as the unified im-

## NATURE AND MAN

petus of an international movement. But the idea that animates it, has certainly lain smoldering in the human mind since those days when people began to think about themselves and their condition. And the demand for the equality of individuals in initial conditions and for the unhindered expansion of their powers, can, in the long run, scarcely be rejected. For it is a demand that does not come and go on a tidal wave, but that has deep roots in our characteristic way of thinking, in our sense of proportion, in the higher mathematics of our love of justice. Freedom and equality are, to be sure, artificial growths, products of the human brain. But when we hear the striving to secure equality in conditions sometimes described as a delusion, on the ground that nature does not offer any analogy, we are not necessarily affected by such reasoning. In fact, if this were quite consistent, we should also have to deny the justification of well-nigh all other forms of purposeful activity—of scientific search for truth, artistic recreation, technical perfection of given elements, all of

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

which are things to which there are certainly no parallels in the rest of nature. However, we do not exist for the purpose of carrying out natural-scientific programmes: the point is to realize our own natures. In such questions let us not look to nature, which we cannot learn to understand anyhow, but rather seek the clew in the study of man, into whose nature we can in some wise, obtain an insight.

And as one studies, one observes that there is a human quintessence, if I may call it so, which is the decisive element. To use a comparison: the ore gets its name from the metal it contains, while the stone takes second place, no matter how predominant it is in the composition as a whole. What makes a human human is not the impulses we share with other creatures: no, it is a special impetus that stands above the impulses, regulates and modifies them, reshaping and renewing them. I mean the impetus that urges us to bring our existences and the conditions about us into agreement with an ideal picture we bear in our hearts. With most of us, the lower impulses

## NATURE AND MAN

predominate, the sheer human impetus is weak and the picture is painted in dull colors and blurred outlines. But it is usually present in some form or other and it should be added that, in no matter how dissimilar forms the ideal reveals itself, it is in reality always one and the same. It aims at a state that is originally not of this world, that is to say, is not a natural one, but which is a reflection of a peculiarity in the human organism. Every creature that is not abnormal finds pleasure in harmony, consistency and functional capability, while he is repelled by disharmony, self-contradiction and waste of forces. Why is it so? With our limited knowledge of psychology, we cannot demonstrate the exact cause of this peculiarity, but can only say, that it must depend on the human being's physical-psychical make-up. We are constituted that we strive after and are satisfied by proportion. One dares not assume that this is the only possible one; but at least, it is the only one to which we are adapted. If we were differently constituted—for example, if we con-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ceived of space as having four dimensions—probably our entire conception of proportion would be disturbed; we would not only have a different geometry but also different æsthetics and different ethics. For the connection between these categories cannot be obliterated and the essential in us is corroborated in all domains without exception. The intellectual pleasure in the coherence of things, the moral need of an adjustment between a deed and its consequences, the technical-economic satisfaction over the application of energy and effective power with their reciprocal equipoise, the artistic enjoyment of rhyme and rhythm, of the symmetry of forms, of the accordance of colors, of glimpses of mysterious harmonies, for which speech has no words—these phenomena all have a common origin. And insomuch as statecraft also is an expression of the human spirit, its ideals cannot be different from the universally human. Statecraft should be the human art in an eminent sense, understood as the art of elevating the human being, of awakening his in-



## NATURE AND MAN

ner powers to actuality, in that it brings about a proportion between social conditions and human possibilities. The artist in words, tones and lines will materialize the essential for us; the task of the artist in humanity is to realize it in life. There are criteria for the correctness of statecraft and they must be sought in the specifically human, just as criteria for all other values are sought. Criticism of what is, formation of what is to come: here they have their firm point of departure and of support. The fact that the instincts of the natural state have still such a wide scope in political practice is the only thing that confuses the conceptions. Sociology looks too long at actual conditions and is led astray to the mistaken conclusion that, because things have been and are so, they must continue to be so for all time. But even in the domain of social practice, the natural must gradually give way to the human element. That this should win ground, that the essential should come to greater and greater expansion in ourselves and extend its sway over the world that

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

surrounds us is, widely speaking, the common formula of progress. And on this foundation a principle of valuation can be built, the general application of which would exercise the most effective influence on the organization of human life.

# WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

### I

**L**IFE goes its way, the old is replaced by the new, the longing for progress is everywhere setting itself a more distant goal. Principles become by-gone, inventions are outstripped, social orders disappear and give place to others. In the midst of all these changes, it is true, certain productions elevate themselves, productions which seem to form exceptions to the rule of transitoriness. There are revelations of art from Grecian days which have preserved their validity thousands of years, there are pictures by Michael Angelo, poems by Goethe, symphonies by Beethoven, under the influence of which, we do not raise any questions about progress. Not that they are the last word in art, not that after them it is vain to seek new forms or

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

new content, but because they of their kind represent the perfect, because they in their respective ways have reached the extreme limit of human capability. In a way art can be independent of time, at an early day it was able to reach a high, indeed now and then, it appears to us the highest point, for it, in its manifestations, depends only on the human being himself, on the expansion of human temperament. In order to produce the perfect in art it is sufficient for a personality to appear, one who unites unusual intellectual powers with a marked gift for materializing that which stirs in his soul. In other departments, in science or technics, the conditions of work are less free: individuality is not exclusive master, one must take account as well of factors which lie outside of the human, of facts of the exterior world which are incessantly being influenced by a changed and widened knowledge. Therefore progress plays quite a different rôle in the field of science and technics than in that of art, but in recompense there is to be found no scientific nor techno-



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

logical master-piece in such an absolute meaning of the term as an artistic one can be. A theory, a hypothesis, a discovery or invention never indicates a completion valid in itself; to be pushed aside, to be excelled, at least to be corrected and perfected by later results will be the invariable fate.

If one now turns to the domain of politics, one meets also the same inconstancy; there is no political system, which in the long run retains its value, no political edifice which one day will not fall to pieces or be overthrown. Inasmuch there seem to be similarities present, but at the same time there are differences which one can not help noticing. While science and technics involuntarily strive after progress and there is no possibility of their wishing to revert to more primitive stages, political process can sometimes express itself as reaction and its changes are not always necessarily improvements. And while it may be said in regard to the scientific and technological productions of every period that they, at least in their own day, have furnished the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

measuring rod for the highest conceivable knowledge or skill, politics has very seldom reached even such a relative stage of perfection. Science and technics, as well as art, are undoubtedly identical with culture; statecraft is not necessarily so. It is true it can effect an advance in culture and in the widest extent, when it undertakes to do so; but it may also show itself as flatly inimical to culture, as we well know from history and as we often see even in our own day. How much human happiness has it not destroyed and how many human powers has it not repressed, how often has it not appealed to bad instincts and reaped its own advantage by holding the people in ignorance and bondage. Admit that things have become better, that we live in a period when the tendency toward progress—even in political questions—is predominant. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that, when we look about us, we see many political conditions which give a more or less ancient impression, in other words do not keep up with the adjustments and methods of procedure, which would

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

be quite consistent with the demands of present day enlightenment. That there exists in the general public a culture-consciousness which is in advance of the political practice of statesmen, is an incontestable fact.

In art, in science or technics, one can scarcely imagine the possibility of a similar condition. Things would be in a bad way if those activities had progressed no further than the footsteps of a layman, however enlightened his judgment. Fortunately the opposite is the case: it is the artistic production that educates our view of art, scientific research that widens our intellectual horizon, and the technical inventions that increase our demands for convenience and expediency. In short, here it is the profession itself, its men and its productions, that undertakes to elevate the level of the culture-consciousness. But in statecraft we take it almost as a foregone conclusion that the culture-consciousness must shape itself by its own efforts, that it is it that leads and the profession that comes after and usually with reluctance. Experience has

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

taught us that as a rule improvements in this domain do not originate in those who should be nearest to them, in the directing body, but that the initiative is usually taken by an outside opinion, which gradually grows stronger until it is able to enforce its will. A voluntary work of progress coming from above, such as has been executed by the late Japanese emperor, is one of the greatest rarities. The usual course has been that here and there new ideas appeared which could not be reconciled with certain time-honored conditions, so that the opposition between the existing and the desirable state of things penetrated more and more deeply into men's minds and the incongruity at length was felt as so unreasonable or so intolerable that the majority or perhaps just as often an intelligent and unswerving minority, no longer willing to suffer it, brought about a change. This typical conflict between tradition and the demand for culture is the chief motive in the history of all reforms and of most revolutions. It lay at the bottom of the great French Revolution in 1789, of the

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

different movements for liberty all over Europe in the nineteenth century, and to-day we see an expression of it in the Turkish changes of system and in the attempts at a representative form of government in Russia. Until about 1848, it was concerned almost exclusively with the rights of citizens, the control of Parliament and other purely constitutional questions; since that time it has asserted itself with rising intensity in the domain of social-economics and, in recent decades, it has likewise begun to play a part in foreign policies.

The struggle for culture now stretches itself over the whole line; but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that there is any particular exactingness in the people of to-day. The subjects of conflict are for the most part such as really should no longer be problems; that they nevertheless still await their solutions only shows how imperfect political practice still is. The nations are far from being spoiled in this direction and as a result of this they present very modest claims. In the more

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

backward countries, they are even grateful when the ruling classes do not do too much harm and in more advanced lands, it is considered sufficient if they act in agreement with average public opinion. As might be expected this contentment is evinced particularly in that field of statecraft that has been the last to be affected by the current of culture, that is to say, in international politics. We saw an example of this lately in the Franco-German Morocco agreement. This proved that the cloud which hung over Europe for years, a cloud which time after time had threatened it with war, had not been at all necessary. For the treaty contained no more than what the parties could have agreed upon when the affair arose. Diplomacy had at last submitted to an arrangement which in reason could not be otherwise, that was all. The press acknowledged it; but none the less the result was praised from all quarters in loud tones and that just because it indicated a triumph for "sound common sense," as the papers again and again pointed out. As every newspaper



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

reader knows, one of the best testimonials to a political act is to say that it accords with this common sense.

This basis for appreciation is characteristic; why it is so will be easily understood, if one imagines the same process of valuation applied to achievements of a different kind. Let one attempt to congratulate a poet or a scientist by saying his work is an expression of common sense: I surmise that he would take it as a doubtful compliment. And quite rightly, for in this and in similar arts, no significant work is produced as the result of observing sound common sense alone. With all the advantages which in other respects can be attributed to it, here it reaches no further than for bare requirements. If it had always been allowed to rule, we should live and die in the belief that the earth stands still in the heavens. Toward the new and unusual, it is likely to miss fire. It almost invariably meets pioneering efforts in music and art with lack of understanding, ridicule or opposition. It thought to dismiss the theory of the descent of



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

man with witticisms; it looked upon the steam-boat at first as an absurdity; it declared the railroad to be a method of transportation without a future. In this way it is constantly making itself ridiculous; but it becomes quite oblivious of this fact, for as time goes on, it repents and appropriates as its own, the same results when they are no longer quite new. At best, then, it may become in art, science, and technics, the broad fulcrum for the elevation of culture. In politics, on the other hand, we have come no further than to believe that the satisfaction of the demand for sound common sense is the summit, the very ideal of culture. The day its demands shall be realized in their entirety, the greatest of all revolutions will be consummated. Let us only imagine the tremendous disarrangement that would take place, if the realization of one single demand should be accomplished—the demand that is expressed in the famous formula of Saint-Simon—that every individual shall be made use of according to his capabilities and rewarded according to his

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

performances. No sentence could be more intelligible, more in keeping with right or reason; in principle all can agree to it. But in life we are constantly sinning against it, and not only that: attempts toward its practical application are generally decried and, in any case, are connected with so many difficulties that most people doubt the possibility of its accomplishment.

It is, in fact, a characteristic of statecraft's cultural demands, that in proportion as they are simple to understand, just so complicated are they, when it comes to execution. For example: that peace is to be preferred to war; that the taxpayers' money should be used for productive purposes rather than for armies and fleets; that it is more reasonable to settle quarrels by the courts than to decide them by the power of arms—these are extremely simple truths, which all reasonable people accept. But when state-logic comes into the game they are transformed into problems. Even now that the opposition to concluding international arbitration agreements has been

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

abandoned and these have become general, it seems that, in official quarters, they are still looked upon as a sort of dangerous tool to be handled with care, and diplomacy, as a rule, provides them with a clause which makes them ineffective in just those serious cases where they are most needed. The two Hague Conferences could not agree upon absolutely obligatory arbitration and as far as the question of the limitation of armament is concerned, they simply had to let it drop. The whole world longs for reductions and relief in this quarter, but in the meantime the running-match continues at a rising rate of speed, the burden of debt in the different countries is increased, the deficit in their budgets also and no one can say when or how this condition will be terminated. Never has any period been able to show a movement toward peace like the modern one, never has the disinclination for war been more widespread; but nevertheless it cannot be maintained that the danger of war is any less now, in the beginning of the twentieth century, than in any previous period.

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

That it is always present was proved not long since when the commotion in the Balkans came within a hair's breadth of setting Europe afire. Whether or not Austria wanted war is doubtful, but Germany was hardly desirous of it, and Russia, England, France and Italy decidedly did not want it. Notwithstanding this predominating mood of peace, every single one of these countries, as we all know, might easily have been drawn into a warlike whirlwind. A little more excitement in Belgrade, a blunder on the Servian boundary line and circumstances would have proved themselves stronger than the will of the people. Now is not the mere possibility of such a condition a humiliation for our time? A war which is thought to be demanded by hard necessity may pass; but it is monstrous that four or five great states and several hundred millions of civilized human beings should be forced into a struggle which does not coincide with their interests. And we live under conditions where such a thing may happen at any time. It is a fact that in foreign affairs, we are subject to the power

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

that we call "the situation" and we are so used to it that we take it as a necessity without thinking how uncharitably it reveals the insufficiency of our political machinery. "The situation"—I wonder what one would say of railroad authorities, to whom it occurred to maintain the unforeseen  $x$  as one of the constant factors of traffic? We certainly demand that traffic shall be managed in accordance with a plan, which has calculated and combined all elements beforehand so that such things as situations ought not to arise: theoretically, we will hear nothing of them, they must not announce themselves at all in so far as it is within the control of human power. We reason in this way when we are speaking of the transportation of people or freight; in a similar way, when it is a question of civic health measures or precautionary regulations for industrial works; in short, we do so wherever a risk is present. Our day insures itself in all directions, it is its pride to limit the scope of chance; our culture-consciousness demands that every effort be made to insure the life and limbs of

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

every individual and it seems rather preposterous that we should renounce our demands and abandon ourselves to the mercy of chance when the welfare of whole nations and states is concerned.

If one asks who is the originator of such a political situation, as a rule the reply is: none and all. It is we human beings who created its possibility; but we do not always master it: on the contrary, very often it is it that masters us. As if we did not have enough to do in dealing with the powers of nature, which we must daily fight, tame and regulate, we have created for ourselves a counterpart to it in social conditions over which we no longer have absolute mastery and which sometimes overpower us with the arbitrariness of a natural force. Not only international politics but our social economics also bear witness to this. The money-market, trade, capital and labor are all factors which we sometimes see suddenly get beyond our control. The great crises which visit the business world at intervals, are in the fewest cases called forth de-



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

liberately; as a rule they rise of themselves, so to speak. No one has wished them, few profit by them; but one fine day they are there, unexpected, inexorable. And then we begin to look for their causes and think to find them, in most cases, in over-production—which, if the explanation is correct, would indicate that it is really the product that rules the producer. Of course it should be just the opposite; but we are obliged to acknowledge that the complex of conditions which constitute our social economics overmasters us only too often. The enormous increase and augmented circulation of floating capital, the working classes awakening to self-consciousness and self-assertion, the revolutionizing of the processes of production and the perfecting of the means of transportation: each of these circumstances has marked an advance. But they have united to produce a chaos of powers and endeavors to which no ordering spirit, up to this time, has brought unity or systematic direction. It is here that economic politics should take the lead; but this has not kept pace with the de-



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

velopment of private economics. The interference of the state in economics is limited essentially to fiscal measures, groping social legislation and a tariff protection which, for the most part, is stamped by the sheerest empiricism. Constitutionally, administratively and politically, society is organized, but economically it lives in mediæval irregularity. A man is fined if he empties water from his window into the street, but the same man, unhindered by law or established custom, can cause a panic, a bank-failure, a strike or a lock-out which brings confusion to the interests of thousands of people. He runs the risk of imprisonment, if he appropriates some one's else pocketbook, but it may be a perfectly lawful proceeding for him to put several millions of other people's money into his pockets, if (*nota bene!*) this takes place on the exchange and that, even when the operation is due to an obvious trick, as when a number of Wall Street speculators, a few years ago, made enormous sums by circulating a purposely misleading report in regard to the Canadian corn crop. He

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

does not attempt to lie in wait on the highway, as the robbers of the feudal age did, and boldly plunder peaceful citizens, but he can become a member of a monopoly and as such can help to levy a contribution on a whole community with impunity. We see this especially in the United States, the hot-bed of the trusts and we see there also how little the public up to this time has accomplished against the abuses of these combinations. All these undertakings, the absurdity of which any child can see, are fruits of a *laissez-faire* policy which is losing ground more and more and which is preordained to disappear. For it is opposed to the culture-consciousness deep down in us which wishes to attain order in things everywhere, a just and expedient regulation of human conditions. And strangely enough it is the trusts themselves that are the guides here, certainly not in the direction of justice, but in the direction of expediency. They point toward a future where the union and methodical application of forces will have replaced present conditions, unsafe and uneconomic as they at

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

bottom are, with their schisms and frictions, their hazardous production, their destructive competition and their burdensome accompaniment of parasitic middleman. The longing to get away from this confusion asserts itself more and more imperatively. The trusts are one expression of this need; socialism is, though from quite different motives, a further manifestation of the same tendency and these two powers, otherwise so different in nature, can insomuch be compared to two bodies of workmen which each from its own side, are attempting to bore a passage through a tunnel.

The day will certainly come, when the organization of social economics will be a fact; but before it becomes so, there are many hindrances that must be overcome. Think only of the difficulties connected with an affair so reasonable in itself as legally ordained arbitration in disagreements between workmen and their employers. It is not without cause that governments and parliaments are in the habit of being extremely cautious in interfering with things of fundamental significance to

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

the economic régime: they know that there are no enterprises more delicate to handle and that they may run the risk of putting their hands in a wasp's nest. That speculation frenzies, business crises, suspension of work and glutting of the market are not beneficial phenomena, we all agree upon beforehand. But the agreement ceases as soon as there is a question of uprooting the evil, of replowing the very earth that breeds these social-economic weeds. A wall of opposition is immediately raised, a mountain of scruples. Exactly as when there is a question of the limitation of armament, which is felt as such a burden by the people of Europe, or of the bringing about of a state of justice that would prevent wars, which the people would be more than glad to avoid. Proposals for remedies meet with so many objections that, if one did not know any better, one might believe that dangers of war and military expenses are considered precious benefits to which we should cling. The same lack of consistency is often seen in internal politics: that a reform is generally acknowl-

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

edged to be cheap and beneficial, does not mean that it will always be put into execution. In Prussia, election by classes has, from its very introduction, been looked upon as an absurdity by the large majority, but nevertheless, no one can deny, that this system is about to celebrate its sixtieth birthday unshaken. In England, the House of Lords has long been a negative factor, which serves no purpose except to thwart the work of the representatives of the people; but the agitational movements against this inherited right of representation have, up to this time, come to nothing and if, as is prophesied, a near future will put an end to the veto of the Lords, it is certainly not too early. In France, democracy has prevailed for a generation; but the country continues to be afflicted with a tax-system which is not at all democratic and in spite of the fact that an overpowering majority would profit by an adjustment of the taxes, they have been put up year after year and it remains to be seen whether a reform can be effected in any large degree. Now why is it that in politics things

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

cannot always be arranged in the way the majority really wishes and which the demands of reason seem also to suggest? This can be answered by a reference to the influence of conservatism. Very well; but one cannot overlook the fact that, in other domains, the same weight is not attributed to conservatism. In other respects, human beings are in the habit of going about things more or less rationally. When a flood threatens, they build a dam; when a jutting crag makes a road impassable they blast the obstruction away. In politics, they do not always act in a corresponding way. And yet—so should a theorist think—it could be done all the more easily, since it is not necessary in this, as it is in technics, to take account of nature, which is an opposing element: the improvement of institutions depends ultimately on human beings themselves.

Nevertheless, as we know, social problems are generally much more difficult to solve than technical ones. But the question is: in what does their difficulty lie? And then we must immediately reply: it does not lie so much in



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

their purely professional ordering, as most people are inclined to assume and as professionals like to make themselves and others believe. Many of these so-called problems are far from complex—on the contrary, they are of a pathetic simplicity, in that they reduce themselves to the pure and simple elimination of superfluous or harmful things. Nor is there, at bottom, any dissimilarity between technical and social progress: both aim at the removal of hampering circumstances, the avoidance of collisions, the increase of the useful activity of forces. Even the demand for justice, that specific social phenomenon, can finally be comprehended technically, be referred to a mathematical formula, to a comparison which expresses an accurate proportionateness. It ought to be possible to calculate the proportion between what a man gives and what he receives, between merit and social lot, in the large majority of cases down to a fine point. Strictly speaking, we should be able to treat computatively practically all social questions, international, political and social-economic.



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

When the individual factors are known, it seems as though it ought to be possible to discover the most perfect form for their coöperation, to create the conditions, to construct the arrangements, that would bring about a minimum of inconvenience and a maximum of effectiveness. Calculation is, sometimes, applied also to the social domain: we see indeed how statistics are being used more and more for proof and guidance. But its field of activity is limited: it plays a decisive part only in matters of secondary importance, in the regulation of details. The exact method has never yet been exclusively determinative in any of the great questions that arouse the feelings of nations and states, classes and parties. If one should proceed here with the same liberty of thought as that with which one plans a piece of engineering work or improves a piece of machinery, one would attain analogous results also.

But it is just exactly liberty of thought that is lacking. Even plain common sense alone would accomplish a great deal, if it were al-

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

lowed full opportunity to dictate. But the fact is that people will not always use their common sense, nor do they always dare nor are they always permitted to do so. They give it unlimited scope, so long as it is concerned with the subjugation or turning to account of natural forces, but they often recoil before its consequences, when social conditions are being treated. The obvious contradictions with which these conditions are encumbered, the downright follies by which they sometimes allow themselves to be governed, would be quite inexplicable, if one did not take into account this psychical peculiarity. If human beings were pure creatures of reason, statecraft would exclusively accommodate itself to the principles of number, to the logic of calculation, to the demands of justice and expediency. But these objective points of view are constantly combatted, they are obscured or led astray by a subjective element. It is an element that asserts itself in many departments of life, but in none so strongly as in the political. It expresses itself here in different guises, it

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

shows results now in active, now in passive forms: on the one side, as passion, authoritativeness, struggle for interests; on the other, as sluggishness, submission, attachment to tradition. But if one traces every single one of these manifestations back to its cause, one will finally find that they all have their roots in the same soil. And this is a point to which I should like to draw attention. All imperfections in our social order have a common source: both the persistency with which they are enforced and the long-suffering with which they are endured, belong under one and the same category of influences. They are due to certain obstructive, prejudicial, hypnotizing operations, the totality of which can be included under one universally valid definition, namely, as regard to might-conditions.

## II

**I**T is scarcely necessary to emphasize the fact that might-conditions have always played a significant part in the life of communities. Every one, who has read his history, knows how wars, oppression and all kinds of encroachment have determined the boundaries of countries, the inner organization of the people, the distribution of the land and other benefits. But he is also aware that as culture advances, might begins to be ashamed of its nakedness and gradually assumes the garb of law. This juridical-moral dress changes with circumstances: in the less progressive foreign policies it often limits itself to the barest fig-leaf, while in comparatively advanced internal social arrangements, it muffles the realities of things most decoratively. But if one looks more carefully, one cannot avoid observing that state constitutions and law sys-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tems are, fundamentally, ratifications of time-honored might-conditions. At all periods, legislation has been an exponent of the conceptions of society held by those in power and has been used by them as a means of protecting their special interests. In former days, it exhibited itself in absolutely unveiled forms. I will only mention such a preferential measure as the exemption from taxation which the privileged classes enjoyed. To him that hath, shall be given was a saying under the old régime and we see that it is still in force: as the composition of certain Upper Houses is an expression of the point of view which believes that the classes that already are at an advantage, socially and economically should politically also be guaranteed an extra representation, an addition of influence. In short, the object aimed at by these institutions has been protection of the strong. It is true, other organizations are now being formed, which on the other hand, aim at protection of the weak and this phenomenon looks like a partial refutation of the validity of the might-theory. But

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

the contradiction is only apparent. If the weak are protected nowadays, if their interests are not left out of consideration either, it is because they are no longer so weak as they once were, it is because they, in reality, are on the point of becoming strong. The various modern movements in the spirit of humanitarianism and democracy would not have been conceivable without that displacement in might-conditions which actually has taken place and is still in progress. If workmen with their unions had not become a power of which the ruling class must take account, the social legislation which the present day boasts of would still belong among pious wishes. If the less well-off classes had not got the weapon of suffrage in their hands, there would never have been a question of the fair adjustment of taxes which now constitutes a standing subject of parliamentary politics of finance. We can be sure that the day the masses should attain an absolute victory, they would advance the unadorned interests of the common people just as partially as the earlier ruling classes have



## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

supported the privileges of birth and wealth. One had a taste of this in Paris under the Commune which openly maintained the supremacy of the proletariat in accordance with the principle that the lower classes are the "people," a view which has its counterpart in the socialistic inclination to consider manual labor the real meaning of the term "work" or at any rate to give it a precedence over other kinds of activity. Every factor which enters into public affairs will attempt to form society in its own image and in accordance with its own needs. In this respect, there is no dissimilarity between monarchy and democracy, between capitalism and socialism, and inso-much as they all employ measures of might, they are on an equality. The great revolution did not go about things any less despotically than the monarchy it overthrew. The party management and the trades unions of the socialists lay claim to a coercive power which is not behind that upheld by the civic organs of state. And on the other side, municipal governments do not disdain to make use of



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

socialistic methods when they serve their purpose: even conservative Prussia has recently given an example of this in its expropriation law against the Polish-born landowners of the eastern provinces. On this occasion all Poles join anew in their hundred-year-old song of complaint about their oppressed nation; but they do not take heed of the fact that they themselves are unusually vigorous oppressors; if they can only get at something to oppress: only see how they have mistreated the Ruthenians in Galicia. It is with them just as it is with the Roman Church which piously crosses itself over the violence to which it thinks it has been subjected by the French Republic—the same church which has the inquisition and thousands of burned heretics on its list of sins and which shows itself to be animated by the darkest intolerance in all cases where it has liberty of action. Be it religions or nationalities, parties, classes or masses—they cannot reproach each other on the subject of the misuse of power. On this point we ought in reality to exempt the anarchists,

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

those who, in theory, deny the justification of any sort of coercion. But not all anarchists are consistent. There are those who wish to coerce by means of terrorism, who think they can prepare for the happiness of future humanity no more effectively than by regaling a number of contemporaneous fellow-creatures with dagger-thrusts, bombs or revolver-shots. Anarchists least of all should resort to violence; but if certain ones of them do so, it is not necessary on that account to represent them as unparalleled monsters. Bombs especially have brought them into disrepute; but we must not forget that the national-liberal bomb-thrower, Orsini, has gone down to posterity as a hero and a martyr. It is true that the anarchists who have attempted to take human life show a contempt for it; but in this, they are but following famous examples. The only difference is that anarchists like to direct their death-blows upwards; while sovereigns, governors and generals prefer to direct theirs downwards and the deeds that the former commit on a small

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

scale, the latter have, by way of eminence, committed at wholesale.

So statecraft shows itself as an employment of instruments of power for the attainment of purposes of power. But as I have already hinted a certain dread of seeing these things in all their nakedness is prevalent. When Bismarck proclaimed that the great questions of the time would be decided by iron and blood the effect of the statement was, to speak mildly, most disconcerting. And yet it contained no more than the corroboration of a fact. The assertion was made with a view to the reciprocal attitudes of Prussia and Austria, and it is certainly a time-old experience that in quarrels between states might is the ultima ratio. But we are not used to such frankness as Bismarck's. It is however allowed in foreign policies, in case of need, although the leading circles here also like to ornament acts which would be considered between men as assault and robbery, with illusory shibboleths about the honor and welfare of the nation, about the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

cause of justice or cultural necessities. But I should like to see the statesman open-hearted enough to acknowledge that the internal policy of his country was inspired by purposes of power and by them alone. Not that there has ever been any scarcity of statesmen that have arranged matters on this basis; but none of them has wished to confess it unreservedly. If we wish to hear the full truth in regard to the significance of power in state-life, we must not expect to hear it from those ruling, for they would risk too much in betraying it, nor must we expect it from the leaders of the opposition, for they attack existing might-conditions, it is true, but only to replace them by others. No, on this point, the full truth is only expressed by men who have been unbiased by personal considerations; we can read it in the writings of philosophers and sociologists, as Hobbes or Spinoza among the elder or Gumplowicz and Anton Menger among the modern, to name only a few among the expositors of the theory of might. These outsiders have been able to reveal what statesmen must keep to themselves,

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

or else run the risk of losing the hold they may have on their contemporaries. In order to rouse the masses to greater action, one must talk to their hearts and their imaginations and a politician who appeals to sheer power only, does not do this. Even a genius like Napoleon could not rule by the language of might alone: he had to strike the strings of feeling, invoke France's greatness, France's *gloire*; but with this appeal, he persuaded hundreds of thousands to go to death for him and his plans. Much less can the mediocre ones, who usually direct the fate of countries, do without the light of a higher authority. And so it has come about that might-conditions have everywhere become identified with the general welfare, though this as a rule has this peculiarity, that it implies pretty general suffering. History bears witness to a constant sacrifice of the life and happiness of innumerable human beings to things, which at first sight appear to be abstractions, such as the monarchical principle, the republican idea, lawful order, civic liberty, national independence, political

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

and civilizational missions. But behind these abstractions, very tangible realities are hidden. And when certain people incessantly exhort us to show idealism in the affairs of society, we must not believe that this towers high over the lowland of interest: the idealism they demand consists namely in this—that we shall serve not our own interests, but theirs. As a rule these people constitute a coterie, a mere handful of people, an infinitesimal minority. Nevertheless they can operate successfully, especially when they play on the patriotic instrument. Wherever it is a question of procuring advantages, political or economic, the fatherland must bear the brunt of the battle, self-interest and the covetousness for power surround themselves with the national nimbus. “America for Americans! No dependence on foreign countries! No profit to the foreigner at the expense of home industry!” This has been the war-cry of the protectionists in the United States, and the masses have followed it and have been obliged to bear the burdens of war; but the profits have



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

accrued to the coal barons, the railroad magnates, the manufacturers and trusts. The high-tariff men knew pretty well what they were doing when they christened their policy the "American system," although the system as far as that is concerned is employed in Europe also. Just as one hears the North German squires maintain their shameless demands under the boast of being the original Prussians, and in Russia the idea that the power of the Czar is an excellent thing has been beaten in with the phraseology which teaches that autocracy is a local arrangement in "Holy Russia." When will people become sensible enough not to listen to arguments of this sort? It is a tragi-comedy to see how they are driven to enthusiasm for so-called "ideas" which properly viewed amount to no more than other people's interests, to offer sacrifices for alleged necessities, which are only invented by high-born dilettanti or officious, professional politicians, to take a passionate part in questions and causes which are not of the slightest interest to them personally. Suppose human beings

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

should some day decide to discard all this irrelevant trumpery, to work each for his own happiness and his own perfection and not worry himself over any other common affairs than those that answer to the general requirements? Would not powers applied in this way result in a total sum of useful activity far beyond that which the present social system is able to produce? It may be objected that this thought is only a chimera, because most people are not so made that they have sufficient in themselves to live their own lives only. Left to themselves they would sink into tedium. They need a certain amount of impulses and sensations, but as they can find nothing in themselves, they must get them from outside and there is a rich supply in the excitement of politics. Admit that the source is muddy, it nevertheless partially quenches their thirst after a more intense life of feeling. I acknowledge that the matter can be observed from this point of view also. But this does not exclude the fact that it would be preferable if this available energy which seems bound to ex-

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

press itself in the form of public spirit, should be led in a more sensible direction, if this entire supply of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice should be transferred to a more worthy aim than the maintenance and forwarding of disguised might-conditions.

It is quite true that certain power-conditions are not necessarily objectionable in themselves. For example nothing can be said against the fact that England has brought Egypt under its sway; for hereby possibilities have been realized which the native inhabitants of the country would never have helped forward of their own accord. It is the contrary with the Russian supremacy in Finland; here we see one of Europe's most efficient communities repressed and subdued by the political organs of another country, one which is less efficient in all respects except just this, that it can secure weight for itself on account of the enormous numbers of its inhabitants. It is this inner contradiction that makes might-conditions an object of criticism, and not the external fact of oppression. Just because op-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

pression is found to exist, it does not follow that it is condemnable. It has been found possible to defend it even where it has appeared in the grossest form. It is indeed acknowledged that slavery was a cultural necessity in those places where work was limited to manual employments exclusively and where, in consequence, its productivity was too slight to yield more than a bare livelihood to all. For as culture demands a certain degree of well-being and as it is better, that it should thrive at least some place in a nation, if only in one order, than that it should not come to any expansion at all, under such conditions it was to the interest of progress that the one class should be kept down while the privileged people supported themselves at its expense, so that at least those chosen ones could practice the arts of civilization. Without slavery, ancient Greece and Rome could not have produced the masterpieces which are a benefit and joy to us to this very day. Not until the economic and the concomitant cultural motive for personal bondage had disappeared, not until this bondage had be-

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

come purposeless, did its moral justification also cease; that is to say, its moral justification as an institution; for in individual cases, of course, it might always be immoral, especially when borne by individuals whose talent and character rose above their condition. At the present day there are no more slaves nor serfs, but there are enough of unfree souls fettered by prejudices, entangled in a blind faith, unfitted for independence. They feel the necessity of being dependent, would not feel at ease if the yoke were taken away; they are to be compared with those submarine organisms that cannot live except under an enormous pressure, or with people who are attacked by indisposition when they breathe in the lighter air of the high mountains. It is they that supply the respectable citizens, the hurrah-shouters, the voting cattle, the victims of war, they seem as if created to be material for politics and they are also treated as such. It is true that Kant thinks that no one should use another creature as a tool. But why should one really not do so, if the other helpless creature is not capable

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of being anything more than a tool? The Kantian dictum is only a dogma of feeling. Our reason does not rebel at seeing one a hammer and the other an anvil, if only both are suited to their respective rôles. But this is an indispensable requirement and what offends us in so many might-conditions is that they turn right and reason on end, that they put people in the wrong places, that they let subordinate spirits do just as they please and prevent their superiors from expressing themselves in acts. When the barriers suddenly fall as they did in the great French Revolution one sees for the first time what an overwhelming supply of talents has lain hidden. I do not need to spend many words on the might-condition which in the form of direct or prescriptive privileges, hinders and limits the selection of forces. This is indeed a subject that has been treated time without number. And yet I believe that most people are not quite aware of the entire extent of the injuries and losses which these arrangements have caused in the course of time. Has one thought of how the fact that the



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

positions of the Foreign Office have always been reserved for a diplomatic body which, for the most part, has been recruited in accordance with the most narrow-minded class-consideration, must have delayed for whole generations the progress of international affairs? Or what a clog it has been upon domestic political life, that promotions to leading positions are made according to seniority to such a wide extent? For seniority also is a might-condition and it represents often, too often, the power of the impotent. In America, years of service mean very little; but in our ancient Europe, it is accepted that a man shall have worn himself out, before he be allowed to come to the front. When sclerosis announces itself his time of activity begins and there can be no doubt that the growth of society has suffered under the personal decrepitude of its higher administrators. Infirmity and power would seem to be a strange juxtaposition, if we did not know that many might-conditions aim exactly at preserving what is about to decay. What is called conservatism

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

or maintenance of tradition consists in great part, in efforts to lengthen the shadow life of by-gone thoughts and orders: it is the past that shall decide for the present, it is the dead that shall rule over the living. There lies in the nature of might-conditions a force of weight and inertia which allows them to endure even at a time when the requirements that produced them are no longer present.

I repeat it: might-conditions are not necessarily an evil, they are just as often warranted as unwarranted. Looked upon as facts they only tell us that a state, an institution, a class, a party or an individual has got control over another of the same kind. But the mere presence of these might-conditions does not offer us any guarantee of the inner justification of this control. It would do so, if we could assume that the most fortunately situated are the cleverest, that the wiser opinions always triumph over the less wise, that justice is always the determining factor in social differences. But we cannot proceed on this assumption; on this most of us can agree, no matter how much the

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

philosophy of history has tried to present the course of events in the best light, and no matter how much a misunderstood Darwinism, fashioned for social life, has wished to convey to us the idea that might is right and that success is statecraft's only standard of value. A glance at the conditions about us is enough to show that success does not always favor the most worthy aims, and that the mighty ones of the earth are very seldom those who accomplish the most excellent deeds, that they, on the contrary, are very often quite insignificant personages. That the prerogatives of birth rest on an accident, that wealth does not endow its owner with superior powers, these are generalities so obvious that one is ashamed to offer them. Less worn-out, but no less incontestable, is the truth that a man may have worked himself up from humble conditions and be a coarse-cut intelligence, a bad character notwithstanding. The aristocratic might-conditions give no absolute guarantee, but neither do the democratic: the might that expresses itself by numbers is hardly any more reliable a

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

standard than that that expresses itself by wealth and rank. I presume that even the firmest adherents of government by the people will acknowledge that sometimes the majority is mistaken also, that a single man may possess much clearer insight into social affairs than the entire public opinion, indeed that it is even the rule that impulses to progress originate with the minority. Taking all in all might-conditions prove in themselves nothing more than success, but as success may be identical with chance, might-conditions must prove their title. The conclusion of this is that they should not be applied as a criterion: as such they are useless.

But observe, only theoretically useless: for in practice they are regular determinators of value. In the first place, in the political domain, but by no means in that alone, might-conditions rule men's minds more or less in practically all departments of life, their influence appears even in fields that would seem to lie far distant from them, as the literary and the artistic. When a poet or a painter has made

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

a world-wide reputation, it means that a public which has no qualifications for judging his work, is compelled and feels itself compelled to yield him appreciation. The wide public does not understand pictures and is incapable of telling a good book from a mediocre one. The renown of which we are here speaking is naturally at the beginning based on an estimation, but its spread is due to an artificially made opinion which gradually takes the form of a power. But it is true it is a power that always has a woof of spirit and idealism. If we wish to observe an unalloyed might-condition we must seek it some place else, and we will not be long in finding it in a quite ordinary phenomenon with which all lands and all ages are familiar: I mean the respect and obligingness which is usually shown very rich people on account of their wealth alone. Whether it is inherited or acquired, in whatever way it is collected, has nothing to do with the matter. It is the money-bag to which homage is paid. And by whom? Not only by those who can hope for an advantage by ingratiating them-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

selves, no, these heirs or parvenus are courted gratis by cultivated people, well-to-do ones at that who do not need to do so: it is an absolutely disinterested dance before the golden calf, this involuntary reverence for the brutal fact of Mammon. In fact it is a characteristic quality of most people that they feel an irresistible attraction toward all who are successful; their thoughts fly toward them as the moth hurls itself into the flame. But, on the other side, they are just as ready to withdraw when a change of fortune takes place; their feelings are immediately cooled toward those whom adversity befalls, even when it is undeserved. Deposed monarchs, defeated warriors, dismissed ministers can all speak from bitter experience. Their only consolation then is in the judgment of history, to which they always appeal without remembering that history is a corruptible judge. It does not weigh so much the facts themselves as the consequences of the acts, its exposition shows it to be dazzled by results, its hero-worship is an interpretation of success. Why should one praise Harmodios and Aristo-



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

giton, while one condemns Cassius and Brutus? The disposition of mind was the same, their deeds also; but it is true the results were different. Why should one put Washington on a pedestal which is denied to Bolivar? A comparison would probably show us Bolivar as a personality equipped with higher potentialities. But the fact is that the North American free states have grown to a world-power whereas those of South America have lacked a corresponding ability to develop. Now when not even historical retrospection can be impartial, it is hardly to be expected that a contemporaneous age, which is in such close contact with these palpable things, should be able to avoid the influence of success, of prestige, of might-conditions.

Consideration of existing might-conditions is, in a high degree, a concurrent motive in the judgment not only of the men of the day, but also of its social questions. Every one whose memory spans thirty or forty years will remember how socialism was once looked upon by the general run of people: for them it was an exhi-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

bition either of lunacy or of depravity. Nowadays, as we know, it is spoken of with relative respect even by its decided opponents. Its teachings, however, have not changed; what has changed, on the other hand, is its position of power. Socialism is advancing in most countries, in France some of its adherents have obtained the portfolio of a cabinet-minister, at the last German Reichstag election it controlled more than three million votes. These externals have made it presentable, even respectable, in the general opinion. And we can be sure that if a successful coup should ever bring socialism to the rudder of state somewhere, its ranks would immediately be increased by crowds of sudden converts, who would act as though they had been good partisans all of their days. Such things have occurred in all revolutions, political as well as religious. Whenever the royal power has enjoined reformation, the people have gone over to the new religion in flocks: they changed their faith in the twinkling of an eye. In France, the prevailing power of the moment has always had

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

a majority on its side; the republic, the empire, the legitimate monarchy, the citizen-monarchy have alternately been cheered with the same almost unanimous enthusiasm, to be afterwards buried under an equally unanimous condemnatory judgment when the might-conditions changed. It is said that a permanent and unifying idea stands behind momentary régimes and parties—it is the idea of the state and the fatherland. True enough, but neither is this idea independent of transferences of power. When boundary lines are widened, when schisms are replaced by unity, as in Italy and Germany, then values formerly valid are re-stamped: the Neapolitan state-consciousness becomes degraded to regionalism, the Bavarian sense of fatherland is branded as particularism. Not to mention the fact that patriotism itself is a product of different might-factors. Individuals who in childhood are transplanted to foreign soil, become just as full-blooded patriots in their adopted land as those who are native to the soil, which shows that patriotism does not rest on an original inherent feeling for

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

a certain country but that it is produced by the accidental surroundings in which the individual is placed. This milieu, composed as it is of a number of both material and moral elements constantly at work, exercises a suggestion that is difficult to escape. It can certainly be asserted that as conditions now are, the great masses have no reasonable cause for loving their fatherland. At least, they have no cause for loving it as a state; for the latter demands much and gives little in return. None the less they are possessed with the idea that it is their absolute duty to sympathize with, to support, indeed, in case of necessity, to sacrifice themselves for the interests of this state, which, in addition, are always confounded with those of the rulers. "All for the fatherland" is a war-cry in which there is some sense if the fatherland is one that secures for its children conditions worthy of human beings, and in this respect is threatened with debasement from without. From this point of view, it was consistent with reason for the Frenchmen of the Revolution to seize

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

their weapons in order to defend the republic against the allied monarchs. But that the Russian people are willing at any moment to suffer, struggle and die for their oppressors is simply an evidence of collective lunacy. This collective lunacy, which is chiefly elicited by questions of foreign policy, has, from early days, been one of the most active supporters of might-politics: without it, they never would have got hundreds of thousands gladly to allow themselves to be crushed under the Juggernaut-chariot of state-reasons. How many really precious lives have not been sacrificed for these imagined necessities, without its ever occurring to the victims that their first duty was to elevate their own existence, that their personal lives must lie infinitely nearer their hearts than their duty as subjects. But the state and the fatherland are such potent facts that they can even obliterate the individual's instinct of self-preservation.

On the whole, there is this drawback to might-conditions that they so easily throw logic into disorder, that they either partially or com-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

pletely cripple the critical faculties. And it is an influence that asserts itself not only on the passive side of the conditions. The possession of power also may have a confusing and demoralizing influence on one's conceptions. This is especially the case with that feeling of power which is associated with the consciousness of being in good company: it may change a human being's entire mental habitus. People who in private life are extremely peaceful, may be carried away into the most violent excesses, when they find themselves in the midst of an excited crowd. Parties and parliamentary majorities may be guilty of infringements which their single members would shrink from, if the general body did not cover the individual responsibility. Certain methods of procedure, violence or cunning, which a statesman would not employ for the attainment of his own advantage, he may consider permissible in his foreign policy: for here he is acting on behalf of the country and knows that he has public opinion to support him. The many influence the one, just as the one, on the other hand,



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

may influence the many. Scholars, like Tarde and Le Bon, have written about the psychology of the masses; whether there exists an exposition of the psychology of leaders, I cannot say. But it appears to me that in such, the problem of power should take a central place. By this, I do not mean the question whether the striving for power is justifiable, for it undoubtedly is, if the desire rests on a corresponding ability. And however that may be, as long as politics continues to be the struggle it always has been, it will be impossible for a man who wishes to take an active part in political affairs to renounce all personal power. The problem does not appear until he has the power in his hands. That the exercise of political power contains an original duality which may easily become an incongruity, may have been noticed. The duality consists in this, that for a leader the people he leads are morally his fellow-men and equals for whom he works, but from the professional or so to speak the artistic stand-point, they are the material with which he works. The two points of view are not necessarily ir-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

reconcilable, on the contrary they would always be congruent when the statesman is the artist in souls that he really ought to be. But it is by no means the case that they always are so, and on account of this, there arise conflicts and dilemmas which never obtrude themselves on the artist in the narrower meaning of the term. It is one thing to struggle with lifeless and inanimate things; another to handle such a refractory and capricious material, as human beings of flesh and blood. The sculptor can satisfy his longing to create by buying a lump of clay. But what of the statesman that also aspires to create and form? The subject he needs is not on the market, it is difficult to obtain and even when he has obtained it, may suddenly slip from his grasp. What remains to him then? An artist is comparatively independent of people. It is true they can withhold their appreciation, they can plot against his good name, but they cannot deprive him of the joy of having produced his work. With statesmen, on the other hand, the very possibility of work is allied with an accidental power

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

over human beings. From this comes the decisive significance that power will always have in his eyes. And the mind's incessant occupation with the preservation and increase of this power may have, as a consequence, that this power, which theoretically should be to him an instrument in the service of society, becomes, in reality, his highest personal aim. A displacement of motive takes place as it does with a miser, who ends by coveting money for its own sake, without regard to what it can accomplish. Neither is the artist free from egoism; but the difference is, that his egoism benefits art, while that of the statesman often brings about a divorce between the man and his work. Insatiable desire for power does not preclude greatness: there are individuals, for whom this very motive power has secured a permanent place in man's memory. Just as, on the whole, distinguished rulers and statesmen may in the intensity of the impression they have made, be compared with the highest among artists and thinkers. But if this circumstance has contributed to disseminating the idea, that the pro-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

fession, with which they have been occupied, in short statecraft, has reached as high a point as other branches of intellectual activity, this is a mistaken conclusion, which is due to the confusing of personality and works. The men, here referred to, have, as a rule, been great in individuality much more than in their deeds, which may just as easily have proven itself to be fruitless, even disastrous. Statesmen have sometimes been important enough; but statecraft itself has lagged behind inasmuch as it has never even approached that perfection, which lies within the range of human power.

### III

NOR could it have been otherwise. Why, can perhaps be best explained by the help of a thought experiment. Let us imagine that it is not only the life of the state that is ruled by political methods, but that art, science and technics are subject to the same conditions, to the monarchical principle just as well as to the oligarchical, to the bureaucratic as well as to the democratic; that, for example, philosophical authorship is reserved to a privileged guild, that the discoverers and inventors, of whom culture has need, are to be chosen by election, or that poets, painters, composers must comply with the rule of seniority before they be allowed to undertake higher works. Further, that no artist, thinker or scientist is allowed to apply his unified powers to his especial aim in life but must constantly squander part of his energy on the consideration of external might-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

conditions. And finally that a constant crossing and interference of might-factors, opposing individual wills, of disagreeing groups and capricious movements of the masses, almost never permits a finished work, but only compromises, so that, as a rule, the work must proceed not in a straight line, but according to the resultant in a parallelogram of powers. The preposterousness of such a scheme does not need to be proved, at least, not as far as art, science and technics are concerned. These activities will expand freely in accordance with their own laws, they cannot endure might-possession in any form. For it raises its head here also now and then. There are academies and authorities that use their official position to exclude certain "tendencies" and persons, and to favor others with partiality in the distribution of medals, scholarships and appointments. There are literary and artistic cliques formed for the mutual commendation of their members and the systematic abuse of outsiders: they agitate in public and in the press and often enough influence public opinion by their brutal concord.



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

But all unprejudiced people are fully aware of the fact that this sort of thing is improper, and, at any rate, it is a case of excrescences only and not of essentials. On the other hand, in politics might-possession has been actually elevated to a principle. Perhaps one will say that this is quite another matter; but I am inclined to think that whatever profession is concerned, the ideal conditions for the effectivity of human work are, in reason, homogeneous. Naturally, it cannot be overlooked that political might-possession can easily be explained, that it is owing both to historical traditions and to actual conditions which still have their significance. The political struggle is a struggle for conditions of existence, often a pure and simple struggle for food: no wonder then that the question of might plays such a rôle. But this circumstance ought not to obscure the knowledge of the fact that the existing situation is not the desirable one, but only a more or less necessary evil, which we should attempt to remedy as far as possible.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

It is also undoubted that statecraft would have remained standing on a lower step than that it has reached in our western civilization, if it had been exclusively determined by might-conditions. In such case, development would have taken place with imperceptible slowness; for might-conditions, whether natural or social, seldom change of themselves: we see their stability in the plant and animal kingdoms, we observe it also in primitive human society. Progress has been made possible only by the fact that the inherent sluggishness of might-conditions has been partly counteracted by an elevating force. In the foregoing, I have pointed out that there exists a political culture-consciousness, which always has the start of political practice, and I have later drawn attention to the fact that this culture-consciousness is responsible for the circumstance that sheer power no longer dares to appear in naked form, but must assume the garb of some sort of authority. Notwithstanding traditions and apparent necessities of practical politics, there clearly exists a feeling that might-conditions

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

do not constitute the proper element, or at least that they need to be brought into agreement with a nobler order of things. What is it now that produces this idea? It is not the memory of a golden age, of a lost paradise, that underlies this political idealism: on the contrary, it usually consists in a striving after states to which the past can show nothing similar. So the higher order of things, from the very beginning, is to be found only in ourselves, it has its dwelling in the human brain. The political ideal, just as well as that of art and invention, has its source in an inner vision, a vision of how things ought to be: it is an assertion of the rights of human nature in the face of the imperfections of external facts. This vision is the pattern and the standard, after which we judge a community, and as the incompatibility between conditions as they are and conditions as they should be, becomes more clearly realized by more and more people, then we shall see that improvements and revolutions are being prepared.

There is a so-called materialistic concep-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tion of history which underrates this psychic factor, in that it refers all social changes to displacement in might-conceptions and especially in the economic. The most famous spokesman for this view is Karl Marx. The parallel between his principles and the Darwinian teaching is striking. Darwin explained the mechanism of biological development as the struggle for existence, which takes place partly between individuals of the same species, partly between those of mutually distinct species. Similarly Marx considered that he had discovered the mechanism of social development in the law of class struggle, in the struggle of the classes for economic existence and for economic supremacy. For him, morals, politics and law are no more than expressions of the ruling economic régime; as it has always been the propertied classes that have had the power in their hands, it is quite natural that they have made use of this to create and maintain an order of society and conceptions of society which, on all points, are in favor of property-rights and the interests of floating capital. There

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

is a great deal of truth in this principle but fortunately it is not the whole truth. It is true the economic organization of society puts an impress on its juridical and political systems, but it is not always the sole determinator. It is incontestable that morals, politics and law have received impulses from quarters which have nothing to do with the economic régime; in this connection I will only mention the Christian view of life and the philosophy of the enlightened age. Phenomena like the French Revolution or like the sociological movements of to-day, do not allow themselves to be interpreted only mechanically, as results of changed might-conditions. Might-conditions have certainly changed position but when this has been the case, it was to be attributed, perhaps chiefly, to psychical factors: on the one side, the criticism originating among the aggrieved classes, which had egged them on to attack, and on the other side, the self-criticism of the favored classes which had weakened their will to oppose. Criticism and self-criticism, that is the great corrective. Without it, social might-con-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ditions would continue almost as stationary as the natural, in the mutual position of their elements, and history would also lose that minimum of reason, which we can now attribute to it here and there. Probably in the course of thousands of years, a development would take place, but it is not certain that this would be synonymous with progress. Progress depends on the ability of our amphibious human race, bound to the earth and at the same time striving upward as it is, to free itself more and more from the inherited subjection to the facts of the external world and to rise to a position of self-government and to obeying only the inner voice, the voice that is within us and at the same time above us.

It has happened that might-conditions once considered indispensable have, by a later generation, been declared superfluous. There was a time when the church controlled all temporal means of coercion, and when the state exercised a prerogative over the faith of its subjects: *cujus regio, ejus religio*. Nowadays it is seen that both the state and the church can



## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

get along without this coercion, the bloody memories of which appear to us only as a number of narrow-minded cruelties. Will it not be the same with other might-conditions, with certain supposed necessities of state, domestic or foreign, to which the present day majority still attributes excessive importance? A future day will perhaps show that the necessities are imaginary and only draw thoughts and forces away from the one requisite of statecraft: that of creating higher forms for human association and human coöperation. In the private intercourse of the upper classes we see even now such a higher form; what we call social life, in the best meaning of the term, is built upon a complex of self-given rules which are observed with no less precision than laws are; it is discipline without coercion, it is an ordination rather than a subordination. An Australian negro would lack all comprehension of this form of intercourse, and we civilized people can with difficulty imagine analogous conditions in public life; but that comes from the fact that our public life in more ways than one sus-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

pects, is still under the subjection of circumstances similar to those of the Australian negro. It will probably be different at a future time when the struggle for existence shall have assumed a more human form, because the material conditions shall have become less precarious, a future, besides, which we must expect will be much more effectively prepared for in the laboratories of scientists than in cabinet councils and parliaments. There is a possibility that technological-economic progress may in time bring about such favorable conditions of existence that egoism and altruism may become reconciled. And it is conceivable that as the general opinion becomes able to act with fewer and fewer self-limitations, statecraft will discard its might-elements as unnecessary, until it at length becomes transformed into a new category for which we of the present day have no name.

But this is a perspective that looms up in the dim distance; we have got a certain form of statecraft now and as long as it stands we must acquiesce in calculating with might-con-

## WHY POLITICS LAGS BEHIND

ditions. Nor is it these that are the real evils of politics: the chief evil lies much more in the consideration of which they are the object, in other words, it lies in the fact that reason always bends before existing might-conditions, while it should be the contrary; might-conditions should adapt themselves to reason. The task of rational politics may be presented from different sides: it can be considered as a scientific problem, as a social-technological question, also, I dare say, as the procurement of an artistic harmony: all these points of view are justifiable. But it cannot with reason be interpreted as work for the preservation and advancement of might-conditions, no matter in what shape; that would be to confuse form and content, to turn a by-question into a main question, to make means the end. For the end of ideal statecraft is the development, not of might, but of man.



OF HUMAN APTITUDES AND A  
HUMAN ART





## OF HUMAN APTITUDES AND A HUMAN ART

### I

**E**VERY human being is a miniature world. The entire past has helped in his formation, the qualities of innumerable generations slumber as aptitudes, in the fructified egg-cell to which he owes his existence. All of us contain infinite possibilities although few of them have the opportunity of real expansion. Most of us live and die without suspecting that we are more than the ego that we ourselves know, that the personality which discloses itself is only a fragment. It is pure chance that informs certain people that their natures can sink to depths at which they are horrified, or can rise to heights which they would have considered unattainable. Sometimes, whether one and the same man is to become a saint or a

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

criminal, depends only on external circumstances. The spiritual register of all of us is certainly not so comprehensive, but as a rule we have more octaves than we are in the habit of rendering an account of, at least more than those we need for daily use. I am not alluding to the so-called occult powers, the surprising transformations of nature which reveal themselves in the hypnotic state. Such phenomena belong to the unexplained depths of sub-consciousness and besides can be verified only in a very few people. It is of much more practical importance to observe the latent qualities, universally existing, the psychology of which seems less mysterious to us because it is connected with biological fundamental conditions. As the most typical example of such a quality, Darwin states the fact that the secondary feminine sexual characteristics are present in every male individual, just as in every female individual, the masculine are to be found, in a hidden state, but ready to appear under certain conditions. As Weininger has elaborated further in his work, *Sex and Character*,

[192]

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

the admixture of elements from the other sex is always present, only in a more or less degree. In a man like Goethe, it must have been unusually strong, otherwise he could not have created a figure like Marguerite. Besides, it can be asserted of almost all great poets that in a way they have been at one and the same time man and woman. But not only that. They not only live their own lives but the lives of many others besides. What a multiplicity Shakespeare held, nothing human was foreign to him: the doubter and the man of achievement, the lover and the cynic, the hero and the traitor, the workman and the master, the general and the philosopher—he has drawn them all and in order to do so, he must, in a certain sense, have been them all, have united them all in himself. But also those who are not poets are more or less microcosmic. Everybody contains a multiplicity of germs, which, though they may not be strong enough to bloom into productiveness, are nevertheless sufficient to blossom into receptiveness. This shows itself, among other ways, in the fact that we are

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

capable of understanding and even of sympathizing with characters reciprocally most dissimilar, even with those absolutely different from our own types of mind. Only excessively limited natures are incapable of this. But for other people, it is quite possible to understand both Romeo and Falstaff, Cordelia and Lady Macbeth. There is nothing in the way of reconciling admiration for Bismarck with appreciation of Gladstone or of finding pleasure in Nietzsche at the same time that one lends an ear to Tolstoy. One can be a hero-worshiper without being capable of a heroic deed oneself; one can feel strangely attracted by the aberrations of the human soul, without necessarily being an abnormal individual. The point is that there is not to be found a single human phenomenon, elevated or base, which does not answer to some tendency (usually embryonic) of our inner secret depths. Fortunately, one may say; for were it not so, most phenomena would awaken no echoes and the content of existence would be poorer than it is. Most personalities would then be for us a

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

closed book, our comprehension of politics, history, philosophy and art would be one-sided and incomplete, and social life, which depends on just such understanding would take quite other forms: insurmountable partition-walls would be raised, and only homogeneous groups could live and work in fellowship.

But the potential tendencies are not limited to the bare receiving of impressions: when they are more pronounced, they seek satisfaction. But narrow reality seldom offers this satisfaction and they must resort to disporting themselves in the kingdom of fantasy. One would be surprised, if one could know how many people lead a double existence, an external and an imagined one: the one, narrow, bourgeois, the other, full of chimeras and air-castles, of intrigues of their own making, and fancied situations, of which they dream they are the heroes and where there is room for their unsatisfied longings and unused powers. Others fill the emptiness which daily life leaves, with the reading of books of travel and historical descriptions or they resort to the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

theater or they devour romances to obtain in the imaginary world the emotions with which real life does not supply them in sufficient quantities. Whence comes the favor which crime- and detective-stories enjoy in all lands and among all classes? It is without doubt to be found in a general and deep-lying impulse: it is the human hunter's primitive instinct which reappears in this way, the same that expresses itself in the public's greedy interest in murders and executions. This instinct, in our comparatively well-ordered society, does not get enough nourishment in ordinary ways and must often therefore content itself with literary stimulants. The inhumane inclinations have been forced back by civilization, but they have not been uprooted. They break their chains and disport themselves, when the opportunity offers: one knows to what savagery excited masses can abandon themselves, in our enlightened Europe, what excesses can be committed in time of war by soldiers who call themselves Christians. One may say that these are creatures from a lower



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

stratum. But what about the African horrors which from time to time have agitated public opinion? They were perpetrated by officers and officials who are supposed to represent a higher culture. In this respect, Dr. Karl Peters is the most notorious, though he did not act any worse than many others. And who is this man? A learned, highly cultured intellect, author of a book on *The World of the Will and the Will of the World*. And it is quite natural to ask: where is the real Dr. Peters to be found, in the philosophical work or in the violent deeds of the conquistador? The correct answer is probably this, that his nature must be looked at from both sides. Only that one of them would probably have remained a secret if contact with an inferior race, the intoxication of power, and the freedom from control had not burst the barriers which would have obstructed this inborn tendency, had he remained in his own country. Our culture is a coat of varnish extremely likely to crack when we come out of accustomed conditions. These words were expressed by a correspond-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ent from the Boxer revolution who reports how a number of European merchants in Tientsin acted when the allied troops came to the relief of the town. They began to plunder the temples of the Chinese and the pawnshops, filled their own pockets and ran off with their stolen booty: well-to-do people and, as a rule, extremely respectable citizens. Yes, to what extent will decorum stand its test? Remember the great bazaar fire in Paris, when the Duchess of Alençon perished in the flames with a number of others. It was a charity festival, arranged by the best people in society; there was present a choice collection of the aristocracy of money and birth. And when the fire broke out, what did the bearers of these respected names do, these elegantly clad gentlemen with nosegays in their button-holes? They stormed the exit, knocked the women over, trod them under foot, let them lie there, maimed, half-choked, dying, bent on saving themselves at any cost. The élite did not behave any better than the rabble did at the time of the stranding of the emigration ship *Sirio*,

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

when the crew turned loose on the passengers with knives and axes, stabbed them to death, cut them down in order to get possession of the life-boats for themselves. But it would be unfair to dwell only on the one extreme. The human keyboard is comprehensive, it embraces the highest idealism as well as the lowest impulses. On the *Sirio* two extremes met, feelings of duty were displayed as well as those of brutality: there were people who risked their lives for others whom they did not know at all; the Bishop of San Pedro did not cease to encourage and bless the drowning, even while he himself was being swept away by the waves. Likewise, during the earthquake of Messina, where robbery and all sorts of violence went hand in hand with heroic and self-sacrificing deeds. Almost all catastrophes of that sort exhibit shining examples of courage and presence of mind, and that often in people to whom one would not have attributed these qualities, because they never have shown them before. And as far as that is concerned, neither is it certain that they will ever

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

do so later. They have their wonderful experience once and no oftener; a possibility which lay hidden in them, appears when opportunity presents itself, and then hides itself again when life slips back into its regular grooves. It is with these unrenowned heroes as with the young man whom love transforms into a poet, but who becomes prosaic again when the passion dies down. Or as with an every-day man when he, in an emergency, gets a brilliant idea or finds a winged word: the only glimpse of genius he ever has exhibited or ever will exhibit.

One cannot learn to know people thoroughly until one has seen them torn from their usual surroundings. What unsuspected inventiveness is developed by ship-wrecked people on a desert island, what usefulness Australia can extract from human material that is pretty valueless in Europe, what a supply of capability in community-organization the simple Puritans showed themselves to be in possession of, when New England gave them elbow-room in which to expand. And what

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

tremendous reserve force, the French Revolution evidenced. It had need of law-givers, statesmen, warriors and behold! it could find them by the dozens, use them, squander them, there were always more, they were there in superfluity. Intellects and characters shot up like a field of grain, the nameless became personalities under the revolution's appeal. It would be interesting to account for what really takes place in the human being, whom extraordinary circumstances cause to appear in a form in which he has never before been seen. Two surmises are possible. The one that lies nearest is that the emotional event, which caused the change, is only to be understood as the outer provocative which reveals what "dwells" in the person concerned, the power that has always existed in him but has heretofore been in fetters. In short, a factor similar to the physical: heat, concussion or friction, which releases the latent energy of the explosive material. This explanation will probably do in most cases. But it is also conceivable that the process may sometimes make deeper

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

incursions so that it may be compared with the chemical, where an admixture changes the nature of the body, as when quick-silver mixed with sulphur becomes cinnabar. In other words, one can present the hypothesis that a new situation, by conveying certain elements to the individual, effects a re-creation in his very nature. It is to be observed in not a few important men that they "grow" with their conditions, as it is called in ordinary speech; as with Frederick the Great from the moment he became king and Abraham Lincoln, when he was precipitated into the difficult crisis of the Civil War. But the most striking of all metamorphoses was probably the one seen to have taken place in Robespierre. No one, who saw him before 1789, would have predicted that he would ever play a rôle, that he would ever be anything more than the little lawyer, who, in leisure hours, wrote tiresome academic lectures and bad verses and liked to abandon himself to sentimental observations in the taste of the day. Judging from every-



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

thing, he was quite without originality at first. But, gradually, as the huge revolution carried him with it, his nature appeared to undergo a transformation. His narrow-minded integrity became a somber idealism, the former chatterer could, in his speeches, rise to a mighty pathos, the sentimental dilettante developed into an uncompromising politician, the pedant, with the manners of an old maid, became a dreaded figure who dwelt apart in his isolated originality. Robespierre's career arouses an idea that is quite contrary to what we are in the habit of assuming, namely, that inner greatness is not necessarily inborn, but can sometimes appear late in life as a result of a psycho-chemical process called forth by circumstances. By which it is, of course, not meant that any sort of mediocrity can be reshaped into greatness. The thing is imagined only as possible when, between the given individual and the supervening circumstances, there exists beforehand an affinity, which allows the connection to take place in the first

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

instance. Expressed differently, this means that, whether one seeks the explanation in the physical or in the chemical analogy, one finally comes back to a common point of departure, to the potential aptitudes.

## II

THESE potential aptitudes are of the greatest importance from a cultural point of view, in that they carry with them the most comprehensive possibilities for influencing a man's entire being. They are in short the prerequisite for the exercise of suggestion. One has often wondered over the suggestive power by which certain epoch-making men have been able, as it seemed, to stamp the way of thinking of a whole people and period. The same Frenchmen who had just been enthusiastic for the rights of men and universal brothership, under Napoleon became a nation which seemed only to dream of martial *gloire*. The Germans who before Bismarck had been called partly in admiration, partly in pity "a nation of poets and philosophers" became, after the appearance of the iron man, practical politicians of the most extreme type, Europe's

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

greatest military power and England's most dangerous competitor in the market of the world. Such revulsions of feeling would almost appear to be miracles, were suggestion really the act of "instilling," as the word is usually defined. Probably it is more proper to speak of it as the act of "eliciting." Perhaps the explanation is simply this, that Frenchmen are accessible both to high-minded ideas and to the attraction of external prestige, that the German nature contains a practical sense no less than a contemplative talent, and that finally, whichever tendency is to show itself as the dominant one, depends on a strong impelling force. This impulse is like the illuminating spark or the acting ferment: the effect may be surprising but in order for it to be attained, the material must be at hand. When Luther nailed his theses to the church door of Wittenberg, the Reformation had already been prepared in human minds: his work consisted in his having given the liberating order of release to fettered powers. The Arabs needed a Mahomet in order to find the road to

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

historic splendor, but if they had not had in them the stuff for a cultural and conquering people, not even Mahomet could have torn them from their shepherds' lives. It has been said of Beethoven that he gave us a new soul, of Rousseau that he was the originator of the sentiment for nature, of Shakespeare that in Hamlet he created the modern human type. Now Beethoven could no more infuse a new soul than any one else: on the other hand, his music awakened spiritual moods, which before him had lacked means of expression. Without Rousseau, descriptive art and lyrical poetry and painting would not have accustomed us to see so much in a landscape and to understand it so deeply as we do, but the inclination to bring nature into harmony with human ideas has been present from time immemorial. And Hamlet has produced such mighty after-effects only because Shakespeare, by a presentiment as it were, created a figure in which the human beings of a later period have recognized themselves and which has helped them to understand themselves and, just on that ac-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

count, has caused many to Hamletize themselves still more. For, of course, it must be acknowledged that if poetry takes its models from real life, in return real life patterns itself, in many respects, after poetic types. The cultivated man's view of numerous things and his manner of behaving in certain situations are, in a greater degree than he acknowledges to himself, a result of literary reminiscences. What poetry for example has effected in the direction of refining and complicating erotic relations, it is superfluous to point out. It is in this case as in many: the reading public unconsciously adapts itself to literary demands. Our great-grandmothers showed it by swooning, our great-grandfathers by shedding tears on occasions which we of to-day take with considerable calmness. Had they so much more feeling than we? So it is maintained, but I am inclined to think that the stock both of sentimentality and of realism is the same now as it was a hundred years ago. Only that then the sentimental strings vibrated oftener and more loudly, because fashionable



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

literature was so untiring in setting them in motion.

Human beings in themselves are much more multifarious in nature than we are in the habit of thinking. But they are not so reciprocally different in nature as they seem to us when we examine dissimilar periods or dissimilar nations. We hear so much of national characteristics, but we cannot think that these lie particularly deep when we constantly see immigrants appropriating them with comparative ease. European families that cross the Atlantic, become Americanized in the next generation at the least; we see children of northerners who have settled in Italy become southerners in mind and body; people from the Continent who spend a number of years in England get the British stamp, both in appearance and in manner of thinking. And I am of the opinion that we can conclude from this that the difference does not lie so much in inherited peculiarities as that it is a product of coöperating conditions, the aggregate of which constitutes the national milieu. The

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

milieu with its tremendous suggestive power is what shapes and reshapes human beings into a definite form. But placed in another environment, the same individuals would feel and think and act differently. For the natural basis in them is considerably more extensive than their national substratum. A nation, a community, a state is a comparatively evanescent occurrence, whose existence is dated only by centuries or at the most by a few millenia, whereas the formation of the individual is prepared throughout myriads of years, throughout innumerable generations and by the incalculable inter-crossings of qualities and propensities. This is the explanation of our tremendous impressionability. Only two sorts of people are less receptive: on the one side, those with stubborn limitations and on the other hand, personalities of the commanding type. But all those who stand in between these two extremes, that is, the overwhelming majority, are malleable in such a high degree that it suggests a thought-experiment: how much more could be made of their wealth of

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

aptitudes, if they should once become the subject of a systematic human art, of social technics, that would have nothing in view but the proper application of human powers and that would proceed with the same real lack of prejudice as that with which material technics understands how to extract the greatest possible advantage from the materials and powers of nature.

As a matter of fact there is no lack of systematic effort to reshape the human mind: it is kneaded by the school, the church and the state. But whether their influence be inhibitive or productive, they never practice a real and unalloyed human art. They do not look upon a human being with an unprejudiced eye and they do not try to influence him exclusively for his own sake. What they wish to fashion is not perfect human beings, but the most convenient material, the most willing tools, the most useful members in an established order of things: the chief point with them is to advance this and not the human being. Statecraft which makes for the com-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

prehension of practically all social conditions, should be the human art par excellence, but it is far from being so. Least of all should we call that which is usually admired in a great politician "human art:" his proficiency in handling his contemporaries in such a way that they serve his own, his party's or his government's ends. Just as one would not call it "the art of painting" when a painter is clever at advertising his own pictures or successful in winning the press, or in disposing public opinion in favor of an academy, a clique or a certain style of painting. The art of painting consists in the ability to paint and the center of gravity of the human art lies in the human being. A purely humanic statecraft would be one which would set itself the sole task of elevating the effectivity of human beings and would attempt to solve the problem by preparing for them the milieu which best suited the purpose—a social order arranged in such a way as to produce a maximum of human values.

### III

A SOCIETY built on humanic principles, this is an idea that I should consider a pretty fruitless chimera, if I did not share the eighteenth-century belief—nowadays so despised—that social systems are capable of being reconstructed from the beginning and on a strictly reasonable basis. The enlightened age, with its “natural rights,” proclaimed it in theory and the French Revolution attempted to prove it in practice, in fact, did substantiate it on several points. But it has long since been discarded as a by-gone point of view, at least in actual politics and in legitimate science. The prevailing doctrine is that society must be looked upon approximately as an organism and that, as such, it is subject to the law of development, which expresses itself in historic continuity. That this teaching has won such wide consideration is due to the cir-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

cumstance that it has partly been elicited by, partly carried on the crests of dissimilar, but mighty tidal waves. Thus it is not without connection with the strongly defined national feelings of the latter day and their maintenance of the traditional justification of popular peculiarities. Also, it is plain that it would commend itself to conservative inclinations, which of course wish that if changes in the existing order must take place, they should do so with the least possible deviation from the former trend of affairs. But what weighs more is the fact that it has attracted so many progressive intellects in that it, on account of the analogy it suggests between the social and biological processes, seems to them the only social principle that is thoroughly consistent with the monistic, natural-scientific view of the world. This supposed consistency would be a decisive argument if its biological parallel held water. But both the character of society as an organic-like body, its development in the natural-scientific meaning of the word and the necessity of a continuity in the social process



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

are refuted by the facts themselves in so many cases that a question mark must be put after the whole doctrine.

First and foremost, a few words about this social continuity. This idea was supported as far back as the early part of the last century by the so-called historic school of law, which formulated its view in the doctrine that a system of law comes into existence but cannot be constructed. It arises in the course of time, through custom and tradition, it has its source in the national spirit and keeps in step with this as the spirit changes under different conditions of life. On the whole, this presentation is correct; the formation of a system of law, as a rule, proceeds in a continuous line. But the rule is not without exceptions. The introduction of the Code Napoleon into the Netherlands, West Germany, Poland and Italy marked a leap, a change without intermediary and besides there was certainly no homogeneity in national spirit and notions of life in the nations concerned. Nevertheless the new code was usable everywhere and in

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

those places where it was afterwards abrogated the action was contrary to the will of the people. Herbert Spencer afterwards expressed the same thing in regard to state-constitutions that the historic school had said of systems of law; namely, that they cannot be constructed. He was of the opinion that they must grow: sudden changes in them will not effect a change in the development of society, which takes place very slowly, by means of numerous intermediate links, none of which can be omitted. In contradiction of this, it can be stated that among the European constitutions, the British is the only one that has had a continuous growth. All of the others have been originally "constructed," for the most part after English models, and they have shown themselves capable of being put into action without having lived through the stages which the English constitution had experienced. Most countries have gone from absolutism direct into modern representative government, and the break with the past has not only been of formal significance, but has

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

everywhere hastened the rate of progress of the whole of social life. As far as Japan is concerned, they have used scarcely a generation to accomplish what it took Europe hundreds of years to do: the reconstruction from the feudal system into a centralized constitutional government. To say nothing of the subversion that took place, when the Mikado, that theocratic ruler, proclaimed the separation of church and state and the neutrality of the government in religious questions: a régime, which most Western countries are still awaiting. That it can be a dangerous undertaking to disturb inherited prejudices and long-established special interests is another question, but there is no inner necessity of going gradually to work. Man is not only a historic creature but he is also a creature of reason and the same receptivity which allows him to be formed by tradition makes him also open to new ideas when they are forced upon him with sufficient energy. "Evolution, not revolution" is one of those oft-repeated phrases which sound like the speech of wisdom but are

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

in reality not very profound. When a new system has been found to be useful to society, one should rather execute it with one blow than go circumlocutorily through intermediate stages, which have already lost their right to exist. Suppose a little town which has until now got along with oil lamps, wishes to introduce electric-lighting, its water-power being easily accessible and cheap, and an official comes along and says that temporarily they must erect gas-works, as historically lighting by gas is the intermediate step. The political logic that is opposed to direct transition to up-to-date conditions, because the matter "is not yet mature," is usually of about the same alloy.

Bismarck once stated to Lothar Bucher that there were to be found plenty of chemists among anarchists, but no real scientists. "Such people know only too well that the whole of nature and the whole of culture depends on successive organic development." As far as culture is concerned the correctness of the statement must be denied. The even-

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

ness in tempo which is understood by "successive" does not reveal itself in the progress of culture. We must remember that for hundreds of thousands of years, humanity lived in the most obscure and anonymous culture-poverty. And then the historic day breaks, with a mysterious dawn and in the course of a few thousand years all that culture-capital that we possess in art, in thought, in science and in politics is collected. And finally in the short space of the last few centuries, certain divisions of this capital, scientific insight and technical resources, become increased by an addition, which in scope and in value, surpasses all the contributions of the past in the same departments. In regard to means of transportation only, the difference between our days and the days of the Vienna Congress, is greater than the distance between these and the classic age. Such increasing speed cannot be explained as organic development: social culture is no organism but an organization. These two things have the same relation to each other as active to passive. The organ-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ism adapts itself to existing conditions, but organization takes them into its service and if it cannot use them as they are, it creates new conditions for them. Even there where the human being seems bound to the organic by his own physical arrangement, he has remedied the defects by the help of organization. In addition to natural life-tools, he has constructed artificial ones. Motors remedy his failing muscle-power, optical instruments strengthen his power of sight. Airships make him able to fly, submarine boats to travel under the surface of the sea, railways and automobiles to travel over hundreds of kilometers in an hour's time. All of them, performances for which his organism is unfitted, and which no one has expected of its natural development. But if we cannot rely on development, when it concerns our physical nature, it is difficult to perceive why one should put confidence in its beneficial influence on the transformation of society. Neither does one do so in matters of detail. Even the statesmen who otherwise do homage to the organic theory,



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

often act in legislative and administrative affairs as if they thought that the order of society were—what it is in a certain way—a machinery which can be corrected and changed. They are quite aware of the fact that just as mortality can be lessened by the laying of water pipes, so can most social conditions—trade, communication, safety and popular enlightenment—be regulated by technical means. The assertion in regard to organic development can really only be defended when the question is to hinder deep-seated changes in the distribution of power and in other spheres of interest.

However the principle of development has also its disinterested believers just as much as any religion. It is true they take great pains not to be religious: they have ceased to acknowledge a personal God and a word like "Providence" appears to them quite out-of-date. And yet they themselves depend on a providence, only with a different label: they call it "development." Development is to cause morals to become more and more puri-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

fied, knowledge more widespread, governments more broad-minded and the social system more just. Eternal peace, universal culture, all this glory human beings still have ahead of them: it will take time and patience, but in the long run the principle of development will bring it. The eagerness for perfection is the only justifiable point in this happy development-creed, but the assumption that development necessarily contains a principle of perfection is quite arbitrary. Development can certainly bring improvement, but it can just as easily bring retrogression and it is not identical with progress as is so often said of it. Progress rests on a subjective conception, on a human valuation, which wishes to direct things in a course serviceable to the end in view. Development, on the other hand, is an objective process, a common rule of Pan-Nature, which, whether it expresses itself in formation or destruction, cannot be said to pursue any sort of aim. Certainly the human being, like all other forms of creation, is a product of development. But the difference is

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

that he has reached a stage of development, where he is no longer at its mercy, because he has become conscious of his own nature and can find ways and means of still realizing its possibilities and demands. The result of this striving toward the materializing of the human potentialities, is progress and not development. In every-day speech, we can call it so, but at any rate it is no development in evolution's theoretic sense. The natural development of life-forms is so tremendously slow that it can play no part whatever in our shifting social conditions.

Looked upon as a product of development, the human being has in all essentials remained like unto himself during the whole historic period. It can be proven that, during this time, he has not undergone any change in physical construction and, in all probability, neither has there been any noteworthy reformation in regard to mental powers. The ancient generations, that bred Æschylus, Plato and Alexander did not stand behind modern nations in intellect: wherever it was

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

a question only of personal talent, the Greeks executed grand works that, of their kind, have never been surpassed. The cause of the present day's having advanced certain subjects further than they did, the reason that our physical sciences and the material culture that goes with them, can boast of productions of which the Hellenes hardly dreamed, is not to be sought in the organic growth of intelligence, but in the progress of organization which is characterized by the exact method and systematic coöperation. It cannot be assumed that during historic times, any real development has taken place in ethical, any more than in intellectual respects, but, on the other hand, progress in this domain, cannot fail to be appreciated. An abyss seems to separate the Europe of to-day from the period of torture and slavery and yet it is a matter of not much more than a hundred years. Could this relatively infinitesimal number of years have been sufficient to produce an organic ennobling of man's nature? All scientific experience goes to prove that an infinitely longer

## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

space of time would be needed for such a modification. The inborn propensities toward good and evil are certainly the same with us as with our forefathers, even those very far-removed. But we act toward each other less immorally than they did or, more properly speaking, we have learned to establish relations that force us to do so in our own well-understood interest. We are also, to a certain extent, led to think and feel less immorally than earlier generations, because the system of checks that surround us has the effect of diverting our minds: the lessened possibility of inhuman impulses being satisfied with impunity involuntarily prevents their rising to the surface of consciousness. I will quote an example that leaves no doubt as to the real situation. In Italy, the number of murderers and homicides judged in 1880 was 3,183, it went down to 2,121 in 1890, and in 1907 it was reduced to 1,373. No one will conclude from this, that the Italians have become morally better men in these twenty-seven years. The wild animal in them is not dead;

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

but less latitude has been allowed to it. The social order is closing round it more and more: it is a triumph for the policy of prevention.

Those who think that human creatures must first transform themselves and that then perhaps they will be ready for more perfect institutions, would do well to reflect on this. I think that, on the contrary, institutions should have precedence and—note well—not only the preventive ones. The hindrance of the destructive instincts constitutes only one department of the human art: the other and by far the more important one, consists in the eliciting of the value-creating powers. If we should depend on natural development, we would become as old as Methuselah without noticing any improvement. Progress can be expected only of a social technology that does not stand too much behind the material. That the latter has taken such tremendous strides is due above all to its scientific foundation. Practical results, of which the past did not dare to dream, have been obtained on a purely theoretical basis. The wireless tele-



## HUMAN APTITUDES AND ART

graph is a consequence of the Hertzian wave-theory and the performances of the dynamo originated in Faraday's and later physicists' investigations of the electric streams produced by movement. The first condition for turning existing powers to service is, that they be investigated. It has shown itself so in the material domain and it cannot be otherwise in the social. But our sociology is not scientific in the same sense as our natural science is: its systems are throughout obscured by dogmatism. Let it free itself from all preconceived ideas and it will probably lead to discoveries and inventions which may compare with the others. And furthermore I dare to assert that if we should suddenly come into possession of the social science after which we are now groping and if we should have the resolute will to apply it as human art, then in theory there would be nothing to prevent the realizing of an ideal society to-morrow. For what the race will be capable of doing in thousands and thousands of years lies already now within human potentiality. That it is outside

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of our present range does not come from the fact that we lack aptitudes which we can count on posterity's having. Practically speaking, aptitudes do not change but the manner of procedure in their utilization is perfectible in a high degree. In this respect, social technic is in the same position toward human beings as material technic is toward the substance of the surrounding world, which being given once for all, cannot be increased by a single atom or by even the very slightest quantity of energy, but whose matter and forces can be regrouped, reformed and transposed so that our conditions of life become utterly changed.

OF GREAT MEN: AN ESSAY IN  
VALUATION



## OF GREAT MEN: AN ESSAY IN VALUATION

### I

ONE author writes: "In the genius and in the hero there is an obscure element which escapes every effort to seize it." Another one says: "In the great personality, there always remains a mysterious remnant, which puts all psychological formulæ to shame." No remark could be truer than these, but neither could any be more superfluous, as what is said here of the great exceptions, is ultimately applicable to one and all. Every-day people are also a mystery, only in a common form and one which, on that account, we imagine to be easy to understand. But up to this time nobody has been able to tell what the individual really is, what it is that unifies his life, what spark ani-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

mates him, what force moves him. Inasmuch the clerk at his desk and the green-grocer at the market are unsolved problems just as much as Cæsar, Mahomet and Beethoven. Scientific psychology is quite aware of the fact that, strictly speaking, no human creature can be explained, if we mean by this a penetration into the depths of human nature. But to this there is no access. We are limited to the surface and must try to guess what lies deeper by the help of its manifestations upwards and outwards. That which is called explanation in this branch never reaches any further down than to a substantiation and comparison of qualities.

Now if we take qualities as the point of departure, we can discover, notwithstanding the enormous variations of talent, no real difference between every-day people and great men, but only dissimilarity in gradations and degree. The qualities which give such men their superiority over others are, in their roots, common to all humanity, they are, in the main points, the same as those which have secured



## OF GREAT MEN

for the human being as a species his privileged position in the planetary life. But in these individual offshoots they bloom with a rare intensity, they express themselves here in a clearer mentality or a mightier will or a more refined and complex feeling. So the great man is one that rises above the average, but he is not separated from it by a yawning abyss. The receptivity which is open to appreciation of the Ninth Symphony is more or less related to the productive power which created the tone poem: the psychical acquisition of a work of art is, in a certain way, a re-creation of it. The famous monologue "To be or not to be," in which the public believe themselves obliged to see a marvel of profundity, in reality expresses only thoughts which, even without Hamlet, would have arisen in every reflecting creature's mind but which Shakespeare has succeeded in putting into typical, common terms. Grillparzer, who himself was one of the great ones, once wrote: "Truly one cannot understand the renowned, if one has not sounded the depths of the obscure. From the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

quarrels of the wine-excited cabmen, there is spun an invisible but continuous thread straight to the disputes of the sons of the gods, and in the young peasant girl, who half against her will, follows her impatient lover away from the swarm of dancers there lies a Juliet, a Dido, a Medea, in embryo." We of the present day do not express ourselves any longer in such well-chosen mythological terms, but even if the form is old-fashioned, the content of the words has preserved its efficacy. It might be wise to remember that primitive instincts still smolder in the most advanced spirits, but neither should the fact be overlooked that even the least-cultured bear within them germs, at least, of the highest productiveness of which the human being is capable. It is forgotten only too often. The inclination to generalize and the pleasure found in antitheses, causes us to be likely to neglect the nuances and keep to the coarsely-cut categories. It is the same as with the melodrama, whose effect on the general public depends on the very fact that it operates with contrasts in

## OF GREAT MEN

white and black, with perfect virtues or pronounced vices, with figures that are angelically good or devilish in their maliciousness. The literary élite smile at this but must be said to do homage to the same tendency when it is not concerned with the theater. It is a pretentious and overstrained worship of greatness which discriminates between the celebrated and the nameless, between chieftains and the common herd, as if they were races separated from each other by interminable spaces; while, as a matter of fact, they form a continuous series of transitions. In the domain of character the gradual rise from weakness to mediocrity and thence to strength and further to heroism is plain to the eye, but the winding ways of intelligence have something much more secret about them, and the word genius is therefore one that most easily produces the idea of disconnected distances. Yet we ought to be able to say to ourselves, that if there were an abyss between geniuses and ordinary mortals, then those that are not of the chosen could never have an intellectual share in the performance

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

of genius. Now we know very well that they are by no means excluded from this and we must conclude from it that a bridge does exist. The truth is that there are numerous intermediary links. People can be more or less great; some oftener and more seldom. Just exactly as, in physical respects, there are many steps to the perfected form, and just as even a quite ordinary face can, at certain moments, assume an expression of transfigured beauty. In certain people, the genius appears only as an isolated flash. It was so with Rouget de Lisle the night he created the text and music of *La Marseillaise*—that once and no more. On the other hand, others have been permeated through and through with genius, but never to the extent that it could not fail them. This is true of Goethe, whom the Revolution likewise inspired, but his play, *Der Bürger-General*, gives evidence of the fact that this comprehensive soul also had his limitations.

Most well-equipped creatures probably have a great idea, at some moment or other of their lives, but such an inspiration, appearing by

## OF GREAT MEN

fits and starts, is not genius. For this, it is necessary that the inspiration should express itself not by chance but more spontaneously and somewhat continuously. However no definite boundary line can be drawn for the application of the expression genius. On this point all definitions are mobile and uncertain. Let me choose an example: the artistic genius. To be such, one must first of all be an artist, but even this is a conception that is not easy to establish. It is true artists are spoken of as a species of their own, they are represented in contrast to craftsmen, dilettantis and the receptive general public. But where is the criterion really to be found? If one looks about one discovers artistic elements everywhere. In imaginative children who in their games give life and personality to dead objects. In loving couples who remodel each other, each in accordance with the ideal which his or her amorous longings require. In the practical psychologist who is reduced—just as for that matter, all of us are in daily life—to picturing to himself the inner habitus of his fellow-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

creatures according to external manifestations, to forming for himself a uniform picture from fragmentary characteristics: a suggestive little act, a characteristic physiognomy, chance expressions, gestures and tones. Each and every one of these goes to work artistically. For what is art if it is not an animation of the inanimate, the idealization of the actual, the joining of scattered constituents into a unity, the revelation of the essential by the help of symbols. Is the artist then only to be found in artistic productions? On this point, opinion is divided. Lessing's assertion is well-known—that Raphael, even if he had been born without hands, would nevertheless have been the greatest genius among painters. It sounds like a paradox but it is only necessary to interpret it *cum grano salis*; then one discovers the truth that is contained in this pungent form. There are many art-subjects that fall short of their rights in treatment, just as there are many practiced artists whose work never reaches up to the level of its creator. What is wrong here? Some disorder or



## OF GREAT MEN

other in the nervous system probably, so that the functions do not operate as they should. It may be that the error lies in a mere trifle; but this checks the connection between the inner view and the technical expression of it. The great tragedy of the incomplete man is that his vision is sublime, while the means of expressing it escapes him. Like another Tantalus he sees the tree with the golden fruit above him, only a hand's breadth more and he can seize it, but his arm is too short by exactly that hand's breadth.

For it is in the nature of things that even a whole series of unusual aptitudes—the most excellent mental powers, the deepest longings, the most unyielding consciousness of purpose—is not sufficient to constitute a genius. It seems that genius usually depends not only on aptitudes in themselves, but likewise on a certain combination of qualities, of which every single one, even the comparatively inferior ones, is just as indispensable as the smallest wheel in a complicated machine. A Raphael without hands would have preserved his har-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

monious spirit, his blest eyes, his peculiar sense of form and color. He would still have been an artist-soul, his conceptions would have continued just as exalted, but he would have lacked the completing link necessary for actual genius. It is true enough that for the painter the hand is but a tool which reproduces what he has seen: without this tool he simply cannot be a painter, much less a genius among painters. That the human being has become, so to speak, the genius among the creatures of the earth, is due to a happy combination: a higher differentiation of the brain, the limbs, the larynx. Suppose that one of these requisites had been lacking, for example that the larynx were not so well-formed as it is: the faculty of speech would then not have been at our disposal, means of communication by language would not have developed our intelligence, history, if we had had any, would have taken another direction, our position on this planet would have been absolutely different from our present one. And just as it is with the col-

## OF GREAT MEN

lective genius of the human race, so it is with the genius of the individual: remove one tendency or another, even one of comparatively secondary significance, and a disproportion arises which cripples the whole combination. In the same way, the subtraction of a tiny characteristic, of a single line can injure the beauty of the most perfect picture. Let us imagine a Darwin or a Bismarck, each of them equipped with the power we know them to have had, with the exception that the one lacks the scientist's patience, the other is without political ambition. We are not in the habit of counting these qualities among the highest. But if they had not been present, I wonder what would have become of these two? Darwin would perhaps have had a glimpse of the great ideas, but would never have collected the material and the proofs which made it possible for them to prevail. And Bismarck would have probably remained on his estate, dividing his time between the activities of a landed proprietor, multifarious reading and eccentric in-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

ventions; a powerful temperament, a superior spirit, but all in all, a mound of *disjecta membra* without form, without center.

Yes, what numberless powers go to waste because the center is lacking. Read the court proceedings against one of these colossal international swindlers, who has been caught after having visited the capitals and fashionable watering places with his exploits and tricks during a lengthy period. When, in reading the extensive reports, one gets a glimpse of the nature of his mind, his methods and expedients, one sometimes cannot escape the feeling that the man is a genius gone astray. Such an adventurer is, in his way, an admirably-equipped individual. Besides an attractive exterior and perfect manners, he has a psychologic sense, which makes him able to handle his neighbors with virtuosity, to play on all strings, to charm, flatter or threaten, according to his needs. He is experienced in the art of intrigue, as he is in all practical tricks, he is free from scruples and prejudices, shifts nationality as he changes his religion,

## OF GREAT MEN

and is not so particular about a marriage more or less. Does not a man in possession of such weapons seem foreordained to triumph in the struggle for existence, to rule over his fellow-men? Are not his gifts just of the sort that have been instrumental in securing the advancement of celebrated monarchs, diplomats and parliamentarians? Is he not kneaded of the same stuff as the great Catharine, the many-sided Talleyrand? But alas! this excellent material for a politician fritters his gifts away, squanders his rare talents on insignificant affairs and finally ends in jail instead of in the seat of a Cabinet member or in a President's chair or at the Councilors' green table. The fact is—as a feuilletonist once remarked of a man of this type: there is a fault of construction in his personality. He has all the capabilities necessary to attain great aims, but the aims themselves, that principle which groups powers about a center and causes them to coöperate in the direction of an important result, this impulse is lacking. Such a grand swindler is in his way a genius without con-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tent, in about the same way as a bull-fighter is a hero, whose heroism is purposeless.

I hear already the objection: "It is quite true that this adventurer lacks an essential qualification for becoming a political genius. But why measure him by the politician's standard, why not apply the measuring rod of his equals? In the capacity of swindler, as a matter of fact, he is a genius. Every one who is excellently organized for his task, has the right to the name, whether this task is worthy or unworthy from a human or social point of view. Go to a zoölogical garden and look at a royal tiger: see how majestically he carries himself, observe his powerful muscles, his elastic walk. It will not occur to anybody to deny his physical perfection and, in this respect, rank him lower than the full-blooded horse, because the latter is useful to us, while the tiger is our enemy. The grand swindler is socially a noxious animal, whose business it is to deceive his fellow-creatures, to use and extort, but he is so made that he does it in a superior manner. He fits his metier as a glove fits a hand, as the



## OF GREAT MEN

cork fits the flask: ergo, he is a genius in his special line." This reasoning in reality cannot be refuted. Theoretically there is nothing in the way of extending the conception genius to all those in whom there is such a pronounced affinity, such a perfect harmony between aptitude and vocation that mastership is attained. But custom and the uses of speech limit this to those who fill a prominent position in certain acknowledged branches. And these branches are those that correspond to the highest needs that society has or thinks it has. Society has always needed, or thought that it needed, a guiding hand, an arm to defend or attack, a thinking brain, a technical apparatus, a system of dogmatic rules and ethical regulations, to insure authority and lighten coöperation. After reaching a more advanced stage, it has gradually come to the understanding that the directly serviceable is not the only thing it needs: that besides this, there is a truth that should be sought for its own sake, that mankind needs also a certain supply of impressions that give life beauty and

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

a higher elevation. So far has civilization reached, and, in accordance with these advanced ideas, geniuses are divided into classes other than the military, the political, the practical and the religious; into the scientific and the artistic, likewise. Those who do not belong under this classification, are not counted as geniuses, no matter how excellently organized they may be.

In other words: the name and rank of geniuses is generally connected with the idea of creating and multiplying values. It is both explicable and justifiable, that such work should have a position of its own. But in this connection a question arises: how are we to demarcate values? Do they come under established heads: the ordering of public life, martial capability, the inventor's activity, relation to God, the practice of art, abstract thinking and exact science—do these exhaust all value-advancing possibilities that man can realize? In addition to these, could not others be found, for which we do not now account? Nor have all the grades that are thoroughly

## OF GREAT MEN

established with us, been valid at all times and in all places. It is not certain that a primitive society might not produce a man with a Newtonian brain. But it does not become developed, the resources on which Newton drew are not accessible to him, and he goes to his grave just as unaware of his own nature and gifts as his kinsmen are. For them there are no mathematics, no physics nor astronomy, but these sciences existed none the less: potentially they existed as far back as that prehistoric time when our diluvial forefathers took refuge in caves. It cannot be inconceivable that something similar may be the case on our stratum of culture, which, it is true, is much higher, but scarcely the highest that can be reached. Now and then, we meet people who give a strong and involuntary impression of significance, of indwelling powers, of internal harmony, but whom we do not exactly know where to place. For their talents do not find expression in any production which ranks them in any one of the traditional classes. How then shall we explain the influence which they

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

nevertheless have over us? Possibly they are hidden geniuses, in a domain to which neither they nor we can give a name, premature citizens of a future world, which will realize potentialities that slumber in all of us, but of which no one living can form an idea; potentialities, the materialization of which will perhaps not bring with them new "vocations" at all, but to which we must attribute an independent value, that is to say a value that is independent of the presentations that are now demanded. As things now are, genius cannot attain acknowledgment without the help of a certain expertness in this or that direction. There is injustice and imperfection in this, that revelation of the essential is so limited by the existence of the casual. And yet the chief point is individuality and not virtuosity. The public feels this, too, and often estimates prominent men according to their personality more than according to their deeds and accomplishments. But neither is this method of estimation thoroughly emancipated from the bondage of vocation. If genius is to assert itself, it

## OF GREAT MEN

must be in possession of a talent. It will be readily acknowledged that people can be quite without genius yet well supplied with talent; on the other hand, the assertion that a talentless genius can easily be imagined, will sound like a poor joke to most people. And yet the thing is possible, indeed it may be a reality that, to the man himself at any rate, seems tragic enough.

## II

**T**O be a genius requires a certain combination of qualities, but for genius to be demonstrable in deeds, a certain coincidence of circumstances is necessary. It is with genius as with a hero, with the great intelligence as with the great character, that its complete expansion depends more or less upon external circumstances. And these are favorable in the fewest cases. When will people cease to repeat that platitude, that real talent always makes its way? Schoolmaster-talk and banal-wisdom. No matter how important a human being is he cannot force his way if he lives at the wrong time and in the wrong place. The highest intellectual powers are of little use in a half-barbaric society, where they can neither assert themselves nor even be developed for that matter. A nature that has propensities in the direction of heroic deeds will,



## OF GREAT MEN

in ordinary times, be doomed to inactivity. It may even happen that the possession of unusual qualities may hinder the advancement of a great man when he is placed in surroundings which require normal individuals and not exceptions. Of what assistance is it then to him that he is a sharp-edged sword? The sword is not at all fit to be wielded in cotton. I wonder how many men there have been who were greater than their lot? Dictators to whom it was never granted to rule, thinkers whose ideas were never preserved in any work, artists, whom no verse, nor tone, nor color, nor form ever revealed to contemporaries or to posterity. Thomas Gray in his *Elegy* describes how he wanders in the country churchyard and imagines that the dust of an "inglorious Milton" or a "Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood," lies under the modest mound. And why not? Even the figures that are considered unique, have certainly more kinsmen than is believed. I know well enough, that there has been only one Napoleon the Great, but there have certainly been sev-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

eral Lieutenants Bonaparte. Only that they remained unknown, because the chance for success did not appear and they had to go under in silence and darkness. Just as there has been only one Caius Julius Cæsar, and yet he belongs to a type, though a rare one, it is true; before him, it was realized in Alcibiades and later was to be found in Mirabeau and Lassalle. In these three it did not arrive at maturity, though perhaps they, too, had it in them to attain the highest. But circumstances were not favorable to them as to their Roman spiritual kinsman, and he alone became emperor, the only elect.

In human society, it is the same as in nature's luxurious supply-chamber: it swarms with valuable germs, but only a few of them fully realize their own possibilities. Indeed, every time great events plow up the soil, we see what a flood of powers and forces is to be found. As a rule, they lie unused. In the hazard of time, place and circumstances, the favorable combination seldom appears, the agreement between external conditions and in-

## OF GREAT MEN

dividual qualities, which is just as important for the advancement of greatness as the talent itself. And even when it does happen that the right man appears in the right place, then the mob wonders over this marvelous coincidence and schoolmasters talk about providential personalities. Was it not a dispensation of Providence, they say in Germany, that leaders like Bismarck and Moltke were at hand, when the time came to found the national unity? The historian and military writer, York von Wartenburg, views the circumstance with less prejudice and is of the opinion that the founders of the kingdom may have had their peers. He expresses the surmise that if Fate had directed Alfred Krupp to a political career, he would have attained results which could be compared to the Bismarckian. He insinuates that in the army which triumphed over Austria and France, still greater intellectual potentialities than Moltke were to be found and he names Goeben and Blumenthal in this connection. Now we know these men at any rate: they succeeded, each in his way, in dis-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tinguishing themselves, though they did not reach fame's summit. But who tells us of all those nameless ones who took the secret of their powers with them to their graves?

The so-called providential personalities are, as a rule, those that win the great prize. Nothing contributes so tremendously to prestige as having been successful and the one who advances to the first place is considered exactly on that account, the appointed one. Hero-worship is, for a large part, an accommodating interpretation of chance and the history of culture, as well as of politics, properly viewed is the saga of the fortunate. It is the account of the geniuses and heroes who did not go to the bottom, of those who were not held down helpless in narrow circumstances, whom no illness nor accident swept away too early, whom no youthful folly ruined for life. It gives us information about the intelligences and the characters, whose activities found opportunities in a land and in a period which had need of their powers, of those who got their chance in those years when their talents were

## OF GREAT MEN

still in bloom, of those whom circumstances placed in a career which allowed them to be themselves to the full. It was a pure chance, the sudden death of his friend Alexis, that turned Luther from jurisprudence to theology and opened the way for him to become the great reformer. It was Bismarck's fortune and not his merit that Frederick William IV, with whom he never could have coöperated, was succeeded by a king who gave him latitude to do as he pleased. It was Josephine's intimacy with one of the powerful leaders of the day, to which Bonaparte owed his speedy advancement: Barras undertook to provide her dowry and it consisted in the chief command of the army of Italy and hereby the point of departure for a world-wide career was given.

That a human being's advancement is conditioned by circumstances over which he has no control, appears most distinctly in the political domain and especially in revolutionary times. It was not Washington who introduced the American liberty movement, not Robespierre who created the French Revolu-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tion, not Gambetta who brought on the war of 1870. The career of any statesman or general will give evidence of the fact that those whom we call men of action come to the front by the help of a certain turn of events that is independent of their will and, as a rule, incalculable. For those who distinguish themselves in other branches, this element of chance does not express itself so freely, nor does it play such a fateful rôle for them; but it is never entirely lacking and, when we investigate matters closely, we will always be able to verify its presence. The artist or the thinker, beholden only to his sovereign talent, can feel rather independent, yet he will always be the child of his time and will not be able to free himself from its currents, whether it be that he struggle against them or let himself be borne on or carried away by them. The significance of his life-work will, in large part, depend on the reciprocal effect of period and personality: if these two factors are irreconcilable, his work may easily be wasted. It is true, there are those who have not been acknowledged except



## OF GREAT MEN

by posterity; but these are exceptions, and the rule is, that if a man cannot work for his contemporaries, his name will not be remembered by posterity. But perhaps objection will be made: do we not see that the greatest geniuses express themselves just in this, that they do not accept their contemporaries as they are, but on the contrary force them into new courses. Certainly we see this and apparently it is geniuses alone who cause such changes, but the point is this that these courses are never accomplished except when the soil has been prepared in men's minds. In regard to the musical revolution which is connected with Richard Wagner's name, Saint-Saëns remarks that it had such rich possibilities of advancement only because it was produced at the proper moment. And if one turns to the history of science and technics how many evidences of the favor of circumstances or period there are on every page. The discoverer and inventor have been strikingly compared to the player in a lottery where the last number drawn is ordained to be the winning one. The

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

more blanks that have come out on his predecessors' numbers, the more probable it is that he will draw the prize. Finally it cannot be avoided: the discovery or the invention takes place of a necessity and the originator is the one who is so fortunate as to come in the fullness of time, the happy winner.

Or if one prefers a comparison from Goethe: the happy heir. One can elaborate the picture and say that those who have won reputation, have done so either as heirs of or as utilizers of the work of others, either predecessors or contemporaries. One can count Queen Elizabeth and Louis XIV among the utilizer-type: their fame is not due so much to inherent greatness as to the fact that they were surrounded by eminent men whose powers they knew how to use so well that they themselves came to be considered the central point in a circle of important men of effort. But in spite of everything such exploiters are not looked upon as stars of the first rank. This dignity is reserved for the great, the greatest heirs: a Cæsar who inherited the Roman republic; a

## OF GREAT MEN

Napoleon who inherited the French Revolution; a Luther who inherited a century-old religious fermentation. These elect come at a convenient moment, when the effects of a whole period lie waiting for him who can seize them. They collect the scattered, they lead to a brilliant conclusion what is already begun and then the world calls it their own glorious work. They are looked upon as pioneers but they should rather be called perfecters. The pioneers point the direction but never reach the goal. To be a pioneer is, as a rule, a very thankless position. The settler sows and his children reap. The whole world knows how it goes with the man who undertakes to start a hitherto untried industry: it is generally unsuccessful at first, but is then taken up by people who reap the advantage of his dearly-bought wisdom, and it becomes a paying business for them in the course of time. And so it is also in other domains: the pioneer falls, he does not triumph. The Greek who lost his life by being the first to spring ashore on hostile soil, did not become the hero of the Trojan

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

war. Achilles, who did not sacrifice himself, became the hero. The story of Protesilaus is of general validity. The relation between John the Baptist and Christ is also significant: the history of the forerunner, who is eclipsed by the one who completes the work, is constantly repeating itself. Philip of Macedon, the French king Pippin both accomplished work that made them deserving of the appellation of "the great," but they missed this honor because they were only forerunners and it was reserved for their sons who overshadowed them. All the epoch-makers are men of accomplishment, representatives of completion. Shakespeare was one, a perfecter of a school of poetry already existing, a perfecter of material he found in the adaptations of others, but which he reformed and stamped with his own mastership. Bismarck was also a perfecter, the realizer of the idea of unity which had lived in the people for a long time and for which its best men had suffered and striven. They could not execute the work, but he that stood on their shoulders, did so. What an effect of

## OF GREAT MEN

overpowering novelty Darwin made and yet his leading thoughts were far from new. One can follow their traces all the way back to ancient Greece, and they appear later in the works of Goethe, Lamarck, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. But the hypotheses of these scientists did not become known because they lacked the necessary materials of experience and experiment. Darwin had command of this material and, on this basis, was able to give the explanation, of which his predecessors had had glimpses, both a sharper formulation and an empiric proof, in other words, could become the perfecter of the principle. And now Marconi, does he not appear to the public as the real creator of wireless telegraphy, while the truth is he is neither the discoverer of its prerequisite the electric waves, nor the first inventor of apparatuses which make wireless connection possible. He made use of a whole series of foreign preparatory workers: men like Heinrich Hertz, Clerk Maxwell, Righi, Branly, Sir Oliver Lodge, all of these have had a share in the attainment of the great end. But the great public knows

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

only Marconi. And why? Because the others were only the pioneers, while he was the perfecter, in that he connected the scattered elements he found, added his own contribution and showed the result to the world in a triumphant achievement.

Now of course, we do not mean that everyone who has predecessors necessarily becomes a perfecter. It is not enough that an inheritance lies waiting, that things take a fortunate turn, that history knocks at one's door: one must also be able to receive the inheritance, to seize luck in its flight, to understand that the hour of visitation is come. Even though Marconi did pluck a ripe fruit, the boldness, the persistency, the practical comprehension, which were requisite in order for him to reach it—these he had, at any rate, in a higher degree than others. Even though circumstances did accommodate themselves to Bismarck in a marvelously fortunate way, he, on his side, knew how to put them to use as no other could, not least by being able to bring himself in harmony with the demands of the situation: with-



## OF GREAT MEN

out this revivifying power of adaptability, with all his talent and notwithstanding the fullness of time, he would never have developed from the Prussian squire to the founder of German unity. The sort of favorable circumstances of which we are here speaking, contribute so actively to the advancement of certain men only because they are not content with being passive receivers. Indeed one can go a step further and admit that the happy chance which so often reveals itself in the career of the famous, must often be interpreted otherwise than as the quite undeserved accident it seems to be. There are those that have luck with them in such a striking degree that it seems as if it flies to meet them, or rather as if they were drawn to it as iron is attracted to the magnet. And rivals envy them and think that what happened to these favorites of fortune—the minor occurrence which led to the great discovery, the unforeseen chance, which decided a battle or created a political reputation—they think such a dispensation could easily have fallen to the lot of an ordinary man.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

But this perhaps is not such a foregone conclusion. It may be that luck sometimes depends on a specially developed power of knowing how to find it, on an obscure instinct which has flashes of expedient combinations and strives toward them with the certainty of a sleep-walker. The thought has been advanced several times and cannot be dismissed as unreasonable. We are acquainted only with the surface of the ocean of human nature; we have only a weak and imperfect idea of the powers lying in its deeps, what Socrates called "daimonion," which was later given the name of intuition, what we nowadays include under the term "subconsciousness"—of all this we have only a vague and imperfect idea. If we could explore this hidden region we should perhaps find that several apparent strokes of luck can be traced to the individual's own nature. As an example, Napoleon's career, his dazzling success, his precipitous downfall, might, at least in part, be explained in this way, that he was originally equipped with an unusual power of the kind referred to, but that

## OF GREAT MEN

it became later temporarily obscured or permanently weakened—which indeed can also happen to other powers.

But hereby the limits of acknowledgment are reached. Let us admit that there is a place where luck and ability meet in a secret affinity: nevertheless this is very little compared to that domain where chance seems sole ruler. Let us admit that the soul can stretch forth its tentacles toward the future and in this way, to a certain extent, can control it. It cannot reshape the past, it cannot move the present, it cannot shake off the iron ring of completed and existing facts. Napoleon's gift of divination might have helped him forward in his career, but he had no share in deciding the external conditions of his career—the annexation of Corsica, his military education, the French Revolution, to name only a few of the chief ones. In a way, one can be the smith who forges one's own fortune, but always in a given workshop. One cannot choose his parents nor his position in society nor the land and period in which he is born, nor the cur-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

rents which bear his age and himself with it. There are no perfecters unless there have been forerunners, no heirs, unless there are estates to inherit. The more we account for the multiplicity of external conditions, which must conspire together to bring about an advancement, the more clearly we see how many important talents are wasted, because they miss the convenient moment, the suitable circumstances, the favorable conditions of life. And this conclusion carries with it the admission that the number of the called far surpasses that of the chosen, that only a very few of the great human possibilities come into their full rights.

### III

**I**T would be an insurmountable task to investigate an historical reputation and try to analyze accurately the elements that compose it; to decide, on the one hand, how much can be attributed to the man himself and his achievements and, on the other, what is due to the work of those who have gone before, to the assistance of his contemporaries and to fortunate circumstances. The correct, just, purely personal estimation is made more difficult by the factor that I will call the reflex of history. For history exercises a retroactive influence, in that it is often in the reflection of and under the visual angle of posterior results, that the people of the past rise before our eyes in more or less relief. In China, the merits of its posterity can ennoble a defunct race and the course of history sometimes shows a corresponding promotion. The Roman kings were

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

very humble provincial potentates, certain of them in addition are no more than mythical figures, but we remember them on account of the importance which the Roman state attained under the republic and the empire. George Washington with all his great and good qualities was no overpowering personality, but the marvelous growth of the United States has enlarged his halo and has caused him to appear in dimensions which exceed the real ones. On the other hand, an estimation may be misplaced, in the opposite way, by a capricious trick of fate. We can name extremely distinguished men from whom appreciation is certainly not withheld, but who nevertheless do not get their full rights, simply because their names are connected with others and greater ones. What did it not cost that mighty and comprehensive intellect, Alfred Russel Wallace, that Darwin became his rival in the theory of the origin of species and I wonder if posterity has not been inclined to underrate Pompey as statesman and warrior because it fell to his lot to be the contemporary



## OF GREAT MEN

of Julius Cæsar. When we stand on an elevation and look at a range of the Alps, our view will unconsciously fasten itself to the very topmost summit. One almost equally high may rise near by but this does not attract our interest. If it rose out of a prairie or if it lay between lower mountains without competition, tourists would flock to it as to a great sight; but in the environment in which it is placed, the giant towers over it and it, on that account, seems less than its actual height. In a similar way, the estimation of personalities may take place. But I will not dwell on these, so to speak, optical changes of proportion, nor on the other externals which influence our judgments. The subject must be isolated so that only the kernel remains. All the more as the confusing by-circumstances which I have mentioned, have to do with fame only, and this is irrelevant to the real problem of valuation, whose chief question is this: what, on the whole, is to be understood by human greatness.

The pithiest definition I know of this is Ost-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

wald's: "A great man," he writes, "is an apparatus that can render great performances." The sentence sounds so reasonable that most people will certainly subscribe to it. Whenever the valuation problem in general is mentioned and it is asked: "Who is the greater, the greatest man?" the reply that he is the one who has performed the greater, the greatest deeds, will scarcely meet any objection. But it is just as certain that when it is a question of judging concrete cases, definite personalities, this criterion will be set aside outright. It is now many years since my attention was drawn to this and the occasion was the following. I was in the United States in the capital of the Union, which at the time harbored two especially famous men: General Philip Sheridan and Professor Alexander Graham Bell. But while the first enjoyed an enormous popularity and the inhabitants pointed him out to foreigners with pride, the other led a fairly unnoticed existence, and it was only by chance that I learned that he lived amongst us. Now of course, the cavalry

## OF GREAT MEN

leader of the Civil War was worthy of all honor, but nevertheless the inventor of the telephone had accomplished a life-work of much more deep-lying significance, and from this point of view, the difference in the popular homage was striking. Seen from the standpoint of reason, it appeared to depend on a reversed valuation; but at the same time, I was conscious of the fact that it did not really offend my feeling that the victor of Chattanooga and Cedar Creek was preferred to the man who had conquered distance. I saw, in it, a strange contradiction, but could not get to the bottom of it at the time and I did not understand until later that the question of valuation is not always decided by the measurement and comparison of performances.

If it were true, that the individual's greatness is always in proportion to the range of his acts, then undoubtedly the revolutionizing inventors would stand as the highest pinnacles of the human race. Indeed it dazzles one to think of the results that the art of printing, the steam-engine, the railroad have brought about.

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

Johannes Gutenberg, James Watt, George Stephenson, each of these has been of more vital significance in the course of things and has helped more to give the world a different appearance than any statesman or conqueror has. But are they considered greater men on that account? By no means; in the general opinion, they do not reach to the pedestals, upon which the highest in politics, art and thought are placed. They are cursorily mentioned in school-books, memorials have been raised to them here and there, which we pass in respectful indifference. The explanation is that they are looked upon as men, whose works were of more significance than themselves. No matter how far-reaching an achievement may be, it is not enough to insure him who accomplished it, a place among the greatest. To effect this, it must present itself as a revelation of his nature, the act and its consequences must be in accordance with the dimensions of his personality. The man will be overshadowed by his own work if this proportion, this organic connection is either absent or can-

## OF GREAT MEN

not be discovered. On the other hand, there are people who seem great to us, not so much on account of what they have accomplished, as on account of what they have been in themselves. A man's activity may have been epoch-making, but his own personality dominant to such a degree that the question of the work he has accomplished and its results, whether useful or bringing misfortune, is looked upon as of secondary importance. It is no detriment to Cæsar's fame, that we can see in his life-work a link in the long-drawn-out process of deterioration of Roman civilization. The final outcome of Napoleon's policy was defeat on every point: his chief plan, the founding of a dynasty which should rule all Europe, suffered shipwreck, and he left France exhausted, more diminished in territory and in population than it was at the time when he had assumed its direction. But he is just as much of a giant notwithstanding and no one will maintain that Louis XI, for example, was the greater ruler, because he, in contrast to Napoleon, strengthened and fortified the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

French monarchy. If only positive results are to be taken into consideration, a sovereign who must be counted the most important that any period has shown is the Emperor of Japan, Mutsuhito. The inner development of the kingdom under his rule, its military triumphs, its growing position of power in international politics: such a sum of progress, compressed into a single generation, is almost without parallel. Nevertheless here in Europe we are not particularly interested in Mutsuhito—so little in fact, that most people are not even familiar with his name. And why? Because we have no opportunity of forming an idea of the man. He is as foreign to us as a Rameses, a Tiglath-Pileser, a royal image in stone from Egypt or Babylon. In short we cannot get a glimpse of his facial expression. And it is on this that everything depends: no one becomes the hero of human beings, who does not show himself to them as a human being. On the other hand, sometimes when one is confronted by an animated physiognomy, this alone is enough to satisfy the demand. Just look at William II



## OF GREAT MEN

how he, for more than twenty years, has incessantly kept his contemporaries on the qui vive. With all the good-will in the world, one cannot point out a single one of his deeds that can really be called great and his oral performances often enough invite criticism. But none the less even his opponents will acknowledge that everything he undertakes is stamped by such a strong individuality, that this alone makes him a marvelous phenomenon.

Emerson once propounded the question, why it was that the personal importance of many men was valued more highly than their acts seem to authorize. And he thought that he found the solution of this problem in the character of these men, which he interpreted as accumulated power acting on its surroundings by its mere presence. In this connection, he names Mirabeau, and if he lived still would perhaps refer to his compatriot Mr. Roosevelt. For the ex-president's enormous prestige cannot be explained by the process of objective valuation. In the White House, he did not master the greater problems at issue and as

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

an author and speaker he does not rise any place above the level of every-day ideas. He offers his public high-principled opinions, obvious truths and nothing more. But he flings them out with an unusual agitatorial power and with an art of staging himself worthy of admiration; he is evidently charged with a vitality which cannot fail to exert an influence on those about him. Besides this it is a fact often substantiated that the oratorical performances of famous speakers, when read in print, are a disappointment to one who remembers the impression they made when they were delivered to an audience as living words. It was the personality more than the words which exercised the charm. The same words uttered by another would not have produced the same effect. It was with correct instinct that the Americans called Blaine the "magnetic statesman;" the English could have also given the appellation to Disraeli and Frenchmen to Gambetta: it fits more or less all born leaders. The personal magnetism which obscures judgment and will-power and causes people to fol-

## OF GREAT MEN

low a man through thick and thin, almost always has its share in the advancement of the great politician, reformer or army leader. But as far as that is concerned it may also characterize an artist or any one else. Franz Liszt was an incomparable virtuoso, a distinguished tone-poet, an intellectual writer. But all who knew him agree that it was not the multifarious play of color of all these talents, to which he owed the power of witchery, which no one who came in contact with him could resist. The secret, they say, lay in his type of mind, in his charming nature, which glistened like a diamond and diffused a sort of Dionysian intoxication. Liszt was one of those who exert a direct influence; others influence through a medium, that is, through their own productions. For example, Rousseau, who often complained of his inability to hold his own in daily intercourse. But it can sometimes be asserted of them, too, that the individuality of which one catches a glimpse behind their work, is of greater effect than the work itself. Goethe said outright that an

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

author's significance is to be sought, not in his artistic capabilities, but in his character (by which he means personality) and that this, in fact, is the only element that becomes a part of popular culture. As a proof of this, he mentions Corneille and La Fontaine; but in a certain sense, he himself can be also used to uphold this view. The Goethe-esque spirit reaches further than the Goethe-esque production: thousands of its particles fly about in our intellectual atmosphere and are conveyed, like fructifying pollen to people who have not opened a single one of his books. And the examples might be multiplied. How many outside of England read Byron nowadays? And yet he is known by all. His verses are no longer quoted, but his character constitutes a permanent ingredient of our ideational life. And in reality, it is the same with most very prominent men. Their productions are laid on the shelf, their philosophical systems are superseded by new theories, the political acts and social questions on which they have spent their forces lose their actuality. Almost every-

## OF GREAT MEN

thing that is accomplished becomes gradually buried under the advancing waves of time. But above the surface of the water, certain summits can long be seen—the great personalities. The memory of personality outlives the interest for the work and finally becomes the chief, indeed the only standard of values. I have known many who have preferred Gladstone's policy to Bismarck's and thought that the methods of the British statesman would prove more viable than the tendencies which the great German represented. But I have never heard any one prophesy that Gladstone would, on that account, appear to posterity as the greater of the two. Besides, in twenty years, who will worry about Gladstone's and Bismarck's tendencies and methods? No other than historians; the ideas of the day will have taken an entirely new trend. But Bismarck will undoubtedly be remembered as the unique man he was; as the implacable realist with the poetical vein, with the caustic critical powers and the creative desire for action, the clear understanding and the ef-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

fervescent temperament. Was he a benefactor of his country? Was he a scourge of his day? These questions will become of secondary importance. They will be overshadowed by the fact that he enriched us with a splendid example of the human species in that he gave us himself.

Benefactor or scourge; it is not that sort of thing that finally determines the issue. Notwithstanding all the talk about humanitarianism that we hear in our day, the valuation of personalities has not undergone any change, and those who are called the benefactors of mankind are by no means given the most prominent places in our Pantheon. I wonder how many have heard of Dr. Charles Jackson of Boston, who discovered the anæsthetic power of sulphuric ether and was the first one to make painless operations possible. I open the encyclopædia and seek in vain: the work contains articles about two generals Jackson, but it has not devoted any special article to the one of whom we are speaking. The lives his discovery has saved are innumerable, the sum



## OF GREAT MEN

of physical pain and mental sufferings it has saved the race incalculable, and therefore it is extolled, but the discoverer has sunk into oblivion. On the other hand, there are references to Robert Koch, to Pasteur: both these and other pioneers of the same type have been honored in many ways. Yes, but the homage has concerned their work far more than themselves: it is with them as with the inventors whom I have recently mentioned. The highest praise that is given to personality, is reserved for others than those who have won triumph over sickness and death. "Such a man as I," said the great Emperor to Metternich, when the latter reported to him the victims of the war, "such a man as I cares not a rap for a million human beings," and that he was in earnest he showed with a vengeance. But what benefactor has obtained such blind affection for his person, such unlimited admiration from posterity, as this reckless destroyer of other people's life and happiness. Henri Dunant got the Peace-prize and, when he died recently, a beautiful obituary; but, the

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

originator of the Red Cross, whose grave thousands will visit in reverence, is not the man whom another Béranger or Victor Hugo or Heine will sing in never-to-be-forgotten verses. Nowadays Peace has become a shibboleth, and much is spoken and written about and for it in every quarter; but we must not flatter ourselves with the belief that, on that account, a readjustment of values has been consummated. We must not swear any oaths about it, we may live to see history repeat itself. Let Europe see once more a conqueror, a warrior in the grand style and he would probably be seen to overshadow all the Corypheï of Peace, and his deeds to weigh heavier in popularity's scales than the combined honors with which all the winners of the Nobel prize in a body, have covered themselves.

Famous warriors have always had a particular place in the popular consciousness and the greatest among them are, to this very day, crowned with a halo which Pacifism has not been able to dim. It is most natural to interpret this valuation, which seems so dispropor-

## OF GREAT MEN

tionate, as a relic from those days when the armed struggle for existence was the normal state and, as the result of this, war became the greatest touchstone of a society's or individual's capability. Without doubt this element has helped to create the traditional warrior-worship, but, in addition to this, there is another to be considered: the still unimpaired passion for hazard and betting in all their forms. The love of play, the zeal for sport, the often-exaggerated admiration for the one who wins in a competition, are all occurrences which we know from daily experience. But now war, the gambling of the gods, as Lord Rosebery calls it, is the grandest and most exciting of all sport and chance-taking. Neither the race-course nor the stock-exchange nor roulette can be compared to it as far as excitement is concerned. And no sport demands such a combination of unusual powers as that that distinguishes a great warrior. Quite aside from the military-professional training, what psychological insight, what forethought and foresight, what imagination and calcula-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

tion are required in order to lead an army and carry it to victory. And this, under circumstances in which most people would let themselves be overpowered by their impressions, under the uproar of the struggle, the wailing of the wounded, the devastations of slaughter or the threatening danger of mutilation or death. In addition to this, for the general, there is his enormous responsibility, the size of the stake, the intense consciousness of being the central point in the fate of people who are confined within the limited space of a battle-field and whose destiny is to be decided in a single historical hour. Further, if we remember the intoxication of triumph, then we can understand that a man who has once emerged victorious from a war, longs to come once more under its potent spell: even for such an intellectual and harmonious nature as Cæsar's, it seemed finally to have become a stimulant without which he could hardly live. And it can just as easily be understood that people have always had a feeling that the man whose head and nerves could defy and sub-

## OF GREAT MEN

due situations of that sort, must be of a more perfect mold than ordinary mortals, a figure of bronze like the statues that are raised to his honor. There are people who are not partial to war in itself but who nourish an involuntary admiration for certain leaders, and they can admire them without scruple, for their homage does not concern wholesale murder and destruction, but the great personality. Enthusiasm for personality is the real kernel of warrior-worship, and the respective rank of famous generals is not determined by professional standards only, but just as much according to strength of individuality. Wellington went from triumph to triumph, yet is not counted among the greatest. Scipio the elder, also, was among the infallible, but even if he did defeat Hannibal, in the judgment of history he does not reach to the heights of the conquered Carthaginian. It has been said of Moltke that no one understood the technique of mass-management as he did, that he was the greatest warrior-thinker the world has seen and that he, in this respect, surpassed

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

Napoleon himself. But the efforts that have been made to compare him with the latter or to give him the precedence as some have tried, are not convincing. The chief-of-staff Count Schlieffen attempted, in a speech that he made several years ago, to administer justice between these two, and after what he said it would seem doubtful to whom the prize should fall. But on this occasion, he happened to make a remark which inadvertently casts a gleam of light over the true conditions. "The career of the aged warrior," he remarked, "certainly lacked the imagination-compelling, the legendary-heroic elements, which characterized the young Corsican's career, such as the bridge at Lodi, the banners from Arcola, the crossing of the Alps, the Pyramids, as background for a battle-picture; but he lacked also the sea of flames in Moscow, the horrors at Beresina, the flight from Leipzig, the downfall at Waterloo." Quite right, with the exception that certainly Moscow, Beresina, Leipzig and Waterloo must also be included among those episodes about



## OF GREAT MEN

which legends are spun and which set the imagination in motion. Would one wish to be without them? No, they belong to a connected whole we would not wish to have different. Napoleon always impassions us whether in success or defeat. Moltke also, as a man, was an extremely important personage, but much too much of a professional for his reputation to be able to stand crushing defeats. In the Emperor, on the other hand, personality was so dominating, that professional criticism slid from him as water drops from a marble statue.

Moralizers have more than once complained that it is just those men, who have chastised people the most severely, that have so often become the object of posterity's admiration and in this respect, a new method of teaching history has been demanded for the guidance of the young. I think it would be sufficient to teach them the difference between persons and affairs. I have already mentioned that it is quite possible to value a warrior's greatness and, at the same time, cherish a repugnance

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

toward war as a phenomenon. Just as, on the other hand, I think that one can be a faithful adherent of the Peace movement without necessarily being enthusiastic over those professional peace-lovers, who hold yearly banquets in different capitals of the world. I cannot discover any thoughtlessness, any defective power of judgment, in the appreciation of the great personality in itself, without regard to the service he has done or the harm he has caused. On the contrary: I see in this a sound and correct judgment, which feels that the greatest of all values must be sought in the human being as such, and that they, who in their own existences, have shown us a human summit, have rendered the most excellent service possible to perform. Honor be to benefactors, honor be to those who have helped to improve human conditions, but this improvement nevertheless is only the means to the end, which eventually is the elevation of the human type. And just as certainly as the end is superior to the means, just as certainly must pure life-forwarding activity, no matter how effec-

## OF GREAT MEN

tive it may be, stand in rank behind life itself, behind that sovereign existence which has already realized the highest possibilities.

What may be urged against the prevalent, the popular personality-worship is not that it is applied to unworthy ones or to too many, but rather that it moves within limits that are not extensive enough. It usually prefers leaders and political men with a partiality that, however, is easy to explain. Indeed it lies in the nature of the question that, made as most people are, they will be most susceptible to tangible, dramatic, sensational revelations. Therefore a ruler, an army leader, a tribune, a reformer will, as a rule, be more able to force himself upon men's minds than a poet, a composer, or an artist and these in their turn, will have more chance of making an impression than a scientist or a philosopher. The general public finds Bismarck more explicable than Goethe, and Goethe is more accessible than Kant. In order to estimate intellectual greatness, a certain amount of mental effort and often also information which every man does not possess,

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

are demanded. The radiations from emotional life are apprehended more directly, but only with the prerequisite that there is an elective affinity present between the producer and the receiver. On the contrary, the expressions of a strong will are instantly comprehensible to every one: the spiritual manifestation that is called character, is that which appeals most forcibly to the average human being. So personality is seen most conspicuously in character and character is made synonymous with external activity. That thinking can be just as good as acting, that the heroic spirit can appear in a work of art also, that personality can be seen in intelligence, as well as in character, that these two are respectively amalgamable and that their separation is in reality exclusively rational: all these are truths which ought to be obvious, but which are by no means acknowledged or even suspected by all.

#### IV

**I**N this connection, I will point out the superficiality of the basis of classification which groups great men according to their vocations and accomplishments. The great man, it is true, usually masters his profession but he does not allow himself to be mastered by it as is the case with the pure professionalists: with the painter who loses himself exclusively in technique, or the scientist who feels himself above all, a learned man, as member of a guild, or the officer who talks about "what he owes his uniform" and in remembering the garment forgets what he owes to himself. Greatness consists in something different from and more than the specific aptitudes, which have only an external meaning. That, for example, one person is very receptive to tones, another to forms and color, that the production of the one is musical while the creative power of the other

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

takes the plastic or pictorial form: what does this mean and what is really the cause of it? It is supposed to arise from an inborn peculiarity due to the connection between a sense organ, the ear or the eye, and that part of the brain where ideas are formed. In short, from a difference in the psycho-physical equipment, which however does not necessarily show any more deep-lying dissimilarity. For that which gives the artist his decisive characteristic, is not the nature of the impressions he assimilates, nor the means by which he works them into expression, but the firm kernel about which the essential processes are assembled: his dominant feelings, his special type of mind. And even type of mind has nothing to do with a particular art. A painter can, in this respect, be absolutely different from another painter while his relationship to a composer is unmistakable. For example, the often mentioned parallel between Raphael and Mozart occurs to the mind involuntarily. In this case, it is clearness, simplicity, harmony which make them brothers, while Michael Angelo and



## OF GREAT MEN

Beethoven are spiritual fellows by their profundity, passion and titanic power.

And the agreement does not cease here: it can be stretched further to the still more distant domains of poetry and science. If we take type of mind as a characteristic, we see still more that the form in which content is clothed—the pictorial, artistic, musical, poetical or philosophical—is in the end a secondary matter. The boundary lines are obliterated, and it becomes explicable that Böcklin has been compared to Homer, that a parallel between Bach and Kant has even been drawn. It is discovered that such an element as the dramatic is not reserved for the stage alone, that it also can sound forth in a symphony, that it can permeate to even a research work like Spinoza's *Ethic*, which in the emotional exposition of its five books has actually been compared with the five acts of a drama. Further, association has been noted between the artistic and the scientific effort to separate the permanent unit from a phenomenon's confusing multiplicity. When the physicist or the chemist classifies, under a single

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

main law, phenomena which before him had been explained by different special laws; when the poet, by describing a typical human fate, points out a coherence which has general validity, but which we cannot discern among the fragmentary characteristics and kaleidoscopic pictures of daily life: then they are both animated by the same spirit. And they often have this in common also that a little hint, a slight occasion, may be enough to awaken in them the idea of the great harmony of things. On the whole, this power of anticipative synthesis is conspicuous in those who tower above others intellectually. Many mighty ones had looked upon the misery of mankind about them, but the spectacle passed out of their sight and left only dull impressions on their minds. Prince Gotama on the contrary took it to heart, the first time he became aware of it: the trivial experience became for him the starting point of a philosophy, of a religion, it transformed him into Buddha. Innumerable are those who have seen an apple fall to the earth when it separated itself from the branch but who

## OF GREAT MEN

took it as a matter of course, and did not offer it a thought. But Newton's mind was arrested by the accustomed phenomenon, he puzzled over its cause and discovered the universal law of gravitation. Here we see the great discoverer solve a problem which did not even appear to others in the form of a question. Why should it have been just this one? Because he was the one who could see the essential behind the accidental. And so it usually is with the great reformer: it is likely to be a single occurrence which draws his attention to a general evil, he traces it, goes to the bottom of it and then tries to attack and eradicate it root and branch, while others, at best, have done no more than defend themselves against its scattered and individual manifestations.

The reformer is at once a man of idea and a man of action. Of course it is usual to distinguish between these two, but the boundary line cannot be maintained. When Copernicus slung the earth out into space, his revolutionary thought was an exploit, just as much

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

as Columbus's discovery of America. Scientific liberty of thought which breaks with established principles, likewise artistic sovereignty which will obey only the laws of its own genius, are closely allied with the revolutionary self-assertion of imperial natures which are not content with the conditions that are offered, but forge for themselves a special lot, will not simply adapt themselves to social and political conditions, but force these to submit to themselves, their aims, their needs. On the other hand, fantasy, that gift which is especially attributed to dreamers and emotional creatures, is a power which one finds in all leading spirits. Constantly combining, constantly constructing, it not only asserts itself in artistic production, but also in abstract thought, in technical invention, in the speculation of stock-exchange magnates, in the plans and calculations of statesmen and warriors. Jomini and Moltke have pointed out the similarity between the course of the battle and the drama; York von Wartenburg has drawn a comparison between the qualities

## OF GREAT MEN

which make the great poet and those that make the great strategist. Taine maintains Napoleon's poetic power and juxtaposes him and Dante. The Emperor himself used another metaphor: "I love power," he said, "but it is as an artist that I love it; I love it as a musician loves his violin; I love it because I can entice from it tones, chords and harmonies." Expressions like this make one suspect that the great historical conquerors have not only been men of action with their faces turned outward as they are pictured in the general consciousness, but that they, at the same time, have lived the deepest inner life, a life of ideas and feelings. On the other hand, there have been artists with an inborn desire to conquer: such a one as Balzac who wished "to conquer the world with the pen as Napoleon had conquered it with the sword"; such a one as Richard Wagner, a subduer, a hypnotizer, related to those who have conquered nations and kingdoms. They were heroes in artistic form, but others, who were exclusively centered on themselves, were this also: a heroic soul speaks

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

to us from Corneille's tragedies, from Beethoven's tone-poems.

Artists, thinkers, statesmen, scientists, warriors: what do these classifying appellations signify applied to great men? Only the garment in which their personality is clothed, the special gifts, by whose medium they influence others. But the influence may be homogeneous, although the intermediate links may be different and personality has not its roots in specific aptitudes. These are manifestations of a man's nature, but are not synonymous with it. They can explain his work to us, but they do not exhaust the being that created it. His work and his acts are only representations of a more deep-lying essence, which can only be brought nearer to us by the help of symbols. Our receptivity for such symbols differs in degree, in accordance with our own type of mind: one has an unusual taste for the greatness which appears in manifestations of strength of character, another for that that can be felt as artistic mastership, a third for that which is expressed in intellectual superi-



## OF GREAT MEN

ority. But these classifications may be compared with the colors in a spectrum: in the whole scale, from red to violet, every color seems to separate itself from the others and yet they all constitute one unit, they are all merged in the white light. All greatness, that of the intellect, the feeling or of the will, can finally be comprehended in the concept personality. Great is the man who is equipped with a personality of unusual intensity.

And so what is personality? It is potentiated humanity, humanity in quintessence. The patternable great man would be he who united all purely human qualities in perfect harmony and in the mightiest phase of development. It sometimes happens that the genius and the hero are, in equally visible and triumphant degree embodied in one and the same form, sometimes in a ruler, sometimes in the founder of a faith, and the admiration for such a man is universal, it can amount to worship. Not only Buddha, but Alexander also, became the object of a people's cult. Why? Because each of them appears as the repre-

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

sentative of a supreme form of humanity. How mutually inconsistent it appears to us, conquerors on the one side, ascetics and martyrs on the other. But they are worshiped both these and those exactly as extremes, because they, each group in its own class, show us an extension of human possibilities carried to an extremity; indeed occasionally just because they have attempted the superhuman and have gone to the bottom in the effort. Thirst for life and curiosity about life can never get enough of such phenomena, which reveal how far a human being can move the boundary posts of the feasible, to what heights he is able to elevate his own existence. The more perfect an organism is, the more conspicuous is its desire for life. But desire for life, in a human being, is the same as the desire to know himself. The one who no longer cares about this, in him the vital power is already broken. The viable will seek it even there where it causes him pain, for there too, can fullness of life be found no less than in joy.

## OF GREAT MEN

Consciousness of any kind whatever is the aim and content of all life. The highest form of life consists in the most intense consciousness, connected with the freest expansion of feeling, thought and action, and the most supreme human beings are those who are capable of securing for themselves such an invigorated existence. Almost all who have reached a higher stage of development, wish for themselves a richer life than that which has been their lot, but very few can secure this for themselves, simply by force of their own increased value. Most people must help themselves out more or less with make-shifts, seek a substitute for their own insufficiency and their surroundings, in emotions got from things and events outside of themselves. From books, works of art, descriptions of travel, accounts of extraordinary happenings and marvelous personalities. And as nothing occupies human beings more than the human being itself, it will be great men especially who set sentiments in motion. They,

## HUMAN QUINTESSENCE

above all, seem in their acts and in their being, to realize the life-expansion and life-elevation which is instinctively comprehended as the highest good. Human beings have always felt themselves drawn to such men with a leaning that mythology might have imagined the marble block or the torso to have felt toward the perfect statue. It depends on a secret relationship, a veiled longing: it is the incomplete seeking completion and, in a way, finding it, in a sort of spiritual intercourse with those who can uphold the idea of human power, value and rank. When the qualified yearns for the absolute then this striving, in ordinary speech, is called religiousness and, by this, one means relation to God. But relation to the great, the greatest men has sprung from the same root. Personality-worship seeks refuge in and looks up to those who, in certain respects, are more human beings than others, who represent the human idea better than others. God-worship turns to an infinitely higher being imbued with all perfection, but one which we have, nevertheless, not

## OF GREAT MEN

been able to imagine in any other than an idealized human form. They are both religious in kind and neither of them is able to reach beyond the human.

THE END













429603

Ibsen, Sigurd  
Human quintessence; tr. by Janson.

Philos  
IL473h  
.Ei

**University of Toronto  
Library**

**DO NOT  
REMOVE  
THE  
CARD  
FROM  
THIS  
POCKET**

Acme Library Card Pocket  
LOWE-MARTIN CO. LIMITED

